

**OSCE Human Dimension Annual Conference**  
**Warsaw, 30 September 2009**

Intervention of Mr. Kalman Petocz, Ambassador (Ret.), Director, Forum Minority Research Institute, Slovakia  
Under the Agenda Item 5, National Minorities

Mr Moderator, Mr High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentleman!

I speak on behalf of the Forum Minority Research Institute and on behalf of the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia. In my intervention I would like to build on some important ideas of the High Commissioner's contribution related to the issue of integration of national minorities. I emphasize the acknowledgement by him of the fact that integration should be understood as a two-way process, and that integration should take place with due respect for diversity.

In the past decade, the attention of the High Commissioner in fulfilling his mandate has primarily been focused on the South-Eastern and Eastern regions of the OSCE area. And rightly so. The Human Dimension segment of the OSCE activities should deal as a matter of priority with the fate of people living in war-torn societies, in instable regions with disputed borders, in regions with high degrees of security risk, in countries where the process of democratization is still unfinished. It should not only help national minorities, ethnic groups, displaced persons, refugees to get integrated into the mainstream society, but it also should help those societies as a whole to get integrated into the mainstream OSCE community.

However, national minorities live also in more peaceful, more stable parts of Central and Eastern Europe, now integrated into the European Union. These are long-established national minority communities, with high degree of internal organization and identity. Here, one can find no mass-tombs on either side of the ethnic or national border, no refugees, and no displaced persons. Both members of the major nation and the national minority share the same religion, they go to the same pubs, dance halls, cinemas, shops and work-places. And which is even more important: they marry each other. In the case of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, for example, the share of intermarriages in the total number of ethnic Hungarian marriages ranges between 25-30 percent. Yet, one might sometimes have the feeling that in spite of all positive circumstances, neither the state nor the national and ethnic minorities are entirely happy with the current state of affairs. What is the problem here, what does integration mean in the case of these societies?

The High Commissioner referred to the crucial function of the language. Yes, language and culture – especially that part of it linked to the language – is maybe the most distinctive and important component of the identity of national and ethnic communities in the region. Therefore if the state undertakes to regulate the use or to protect the language of the major nation, it should take into regard the sensitivity of the issue: the language is important not only for the state or for the members of the major nation, it is important for the members of the national minorities, too. In this case especially, the authorities of the state should observe the principle of legislative transparency that this conference dealt with at the opening day. I quote: “In order for laws to be widely accepted by citizens, [...] the law-making process must be open, inclusive and transparent. It must [...] include mechanisms for ensuring that the views and input of those directly affected by the law [...] are taken into consideration.” States should pay due attention to the article 15 of the Framework Convention and to the thematic commentary attached to it, as well as to the OSCE Lund Recommendations.

My second comment is related to the importance of the inter-cultural education. Intercultural education and intercultural dialogue are measures with great potential to overcome the mistrust that still exists between national and ethnic communities in this part of Europe. Intercultural education should really be a two-way process. Minorities should learn the language of the major nation, they should get acquainted with its culture, and they should foster positive emotions to it. However, the same should apply the other way round. The major nation and the state should also show interest in learning about the culture, history and way of life of the minority, in respecting aspirations and desires of the minority, in demonstrating gestures of goodwill towards the minority. If this is not the case, the minorities lose positive motivation in learning the main language of the state and in getting fully integrated into the society.

It is utmost important that states – building on existing structures and institutions – continue to improve mechanisms of inclusive and effective participation and double their efforts in promoting intercultural education and interethnic dialogue in multiethnic societies.

Thank you for your attention.