



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

EDUCATION OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL MINORITIES: INTEGRATION AND EQUALITY

22-23 July, 2010

Hofburg, Vienna

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Background

The protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities has been a central element of the OSCE commitments since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. In the 35 years that passed since the adoption of this key instrument, the right of persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their identity has been clarified and developed further. The education rights of persons belonging to national minorities are a crucial component in this regard as, on the one hand, education is instrumental in maintaining the distinct linguistic, cultural and/or religious identity of persons belonging to national minorities and, on the other hand, it is essential in enabling these persons to participate and engage on an equal footing in all spheres of public life.

International law and OSCE commitments guarantee the *right to education* and *the rights in education* for persons belonging to national minorities. The CSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document for example guarantees that persons belonging to national minorities, notwithstanding the need to learn the official language or languages of the State concerned, have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue. Moreover, the Copenhagen Document provides that in the context of the teaching of history and culture in educational establishments, the participating States should also take account of the history and culture of national minorities.

The rights of persons belonging to national minorities are not only of special importance in themselves but are also instrumental as a precondition for the full enjoyment of many other rights, such as the right to participation, expression, association, etc. It is widely accepted that all aspects and elements of education should ensure a climate of tolerance and dialogue and should contribute to the integration and social cohesion of multi-ethnic societies. These goals cannot be achieved, however, if persons belonging to different groups never meet and never have an opportunity to interact with the rest of society, especially at schools. Nor can tolerance and mutual respect be promoted if majority and minority communities know nothing about each other's identities and daily experiences.

Focusing on practical implementation, this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting will assess achievements, gaps and challenges in the ways in which the education of persons belonging to national minorities promotes both their integration and equality while at the

same time protecting their distinct cultural, linguistic or religious identity. The Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting will discuss concrete actions for promoting integration and equality of persons belonging to national minorities in particular the following three crucial areas of education:

- 1) Facilitating Integrated Education in Schools
- 2) Access to Higher Education
- 3) Adult Education: Enhancing Minority Participation

15.00 – 16.00 **Opening Session**

16.00 – 18.00 **Session I: Facilitating Integrated Education in Schools**

Education systems that do not support maintenance and development of the child's identity as a member of a minority group may contribute to the gradual disappearance of that group identity and, ultimately, to assimilation. If such assimilation is not voluntary but the result of State policy, this violates the rights of persons belonging to minorities. On the other hand, it is essential that children learn to interact and participate with other communities and society at large, so as to avoid the fracturing of society along ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious lines. A segregated society will not only limit the individual's possibility to reach their personal and professional potential to their fullest, but will also endanger social cohesion, prosperity and stability of society at large, increasing tension and possibly leading to conflict.

The educational rights of persons belonging to national minorities to be taught the minority language or receive instruction in this language should not prejudice the learning and teaching of the official language of the State. A good command of the State language is the key to integration of all within societies and is essential for encouraging participation and maximizing life-time opportunities for individuals of minority background. The right balance between state and minority language(s), which should lead to sufficient proficiency in all relevant languages, may be achieved through various methods, including initial classes in the mother tongue and the development of modern approaches to bilingual and multi-lingual education techniques.

Integration also requires the promotion of awareness and knowledge amongst the majority population concerning the language, culture and traditions of minorities. In this context, it is essential to develop school curriculum and textbooks with multicultural and intercultural content and form. Measures should be applied widely and not limited to the geographical area where national minorities live. Integrated education, both in terms of the content and the structure, is beneficial for the entire society. Facilitating joint classes to the extent possible and joint extra-curricular activities are important for promoting mutual understanding and respect among children of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The core task is to organize the education system in a way which allows for interaction between persons from various groups in order to encourage respect of cultural diversity and plurality of views, while at the same time ensuring the successful maintenance and development of language, culture and identity of members belonging to various minority groups. The purpose of this session is to discuss how the structures and content of education

can ensure the balance between the two aims outlined above in order to achieve “integration with respect for diversity”.

The following issues can be considered for the discussion:

- Which types of minority language schools better ensure competence in both the mother tongue and the State language?
- How can education system best reflect and accommodate interests of diverse stakeholders, including State authorities, educators, minority groups, parents, and local authorities, especially when these interests appear to diverge?
- How to best ensure the proper training of multilingual and bilingual teachers so that lack of such teachers is not used as an excuse for not offering bilingual or minority language education?
- How to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated for improving the standard of education, especially in poor, transition societies?
- How to ensure that textbooks of high quality are developed in minority languages? What support kin-state may or may not provide in this context?
- Should the content of textbooks and the curriculum be subject to periodic review with the aim of ensuring its pluralistic and multicultural nature?
- How to encourage acceptance of integrated forms of education in conflict and post-conflict societies?
- Fully integrated education may not always be possible and may be particularly difficult to achieve in regions where minorities live in compact settlements, especially in post-conflict areas. Some persons belonging to national minorities may also for religious or cultural reasons be strongly attached to separate education. In these cases, what efforts can States make to encourage contacts between minority and majority students, for example through extra-curricular activities and school exchanges

Day 2

10.00 - 12.00

Session II: Access to Higher Education

The question of access to higher education (University or polytechnic colleges) for persons belonging to minorities whose mother tongue is different from the State or official language is increasingly becoming a matter of concern. In places where an emphasis is put on mother tongue education, access to tertiary education can be severely restricted due to an inadequate knowledge of the state language. For the achievement of cohesive societies it is evident that all members of society should have access to third level education which is usually offered in the state or state languages if there is more than one.

Increasingly, knowledge of the state language is becoming a prerequisite for access to higher education. Different policies and practices have evolved in various countries, for example, the addition of an extra year of secondary education in order to enable state language acquisition or by emphasising multi-lingual education at primary and secondary levels. On the other hand, when the whole curriculum, including at the university level, is offered in minority languages, there is a risk of establishing parallel, segregated societies. This situation already exists in some countries. The issue of access to higher education for minorities is therefore recognised as a wider problem in a variety of countries bringing to the forefront a discussion on multilingual/multicultural universities; entrance requirements for

higher education and the importance of university research departments in maintaining and protecting the culture and language of minorities, for example through minority language philology departments and teacher training institutions.

There is no right, strictly speaking, under international law to mother tongue education at tertiary level. It is, nonetheless, of interest what kind of policies may be recommendable. The session will provide an opportunity for participating States, especially those with significant national minorities whose mother tongue is different to the State language, to explain the different approaches they take in dealing with this issue and the problems they encounter including ensuring that academic standards are maintained. Following on the discussion in the first session, the session can also address the types of secondary education systems that are more conducive to allowing access to the tertiary systems.

Questions that can be addressed include:

- What level of knowledge of the state language is needed to enable a student from a linguistically different national minority to pursue a course in third level education, whether this is in an academic field at a university or a polytechnic or vocational college?
- Should students from such minorities be allowed to sit entrance examinations to third level colleges in their mother tongue? In this case, additional classes in the state language would be required. What is the State's obligation in this regard?
- Is there any justification for a quota system for students from linguistically different national minorities.
- In what circumstances should persons belonging to minorities seek to establish their own third level educational institutions and what are the state's obligations in that regard in terms of financial and physical support.
- How can states ensure that minorities receive mother-tongue education and at the same time adequately learn the State language so that they can have access to third level education if they so wish and become active participants in the societies where they live?

14.00 – 16.00 Session III: Adult Education: Enhancing Minority Participation.

The minority protection commitments undertaken by participating States speak of 'persons belonging to national minorities'. It is clear that these 'persons' can be men or women, children or adults. The education rights of national minorities do not only refer to formal school activities, but refer to education and education systems in broader terms, including training activities and education institutions for adults. Policies to enhance minority integration and participation should include the group of adults.

This Session will, firstly, focus on the complex linguistic legacy often faced by multi-ethnic States in which many adult persons belonging to national minorities have an insufficient command of the State language (official language, majority language). Poor quality of State language education for minorities in schools sometimes perpetuates this situation. Experience in the OSCE region shows that the lack of proficiency in the State language is a major barrier to minority integration into the mainstream society. It hampers participation in public life, limits the opportunities in the employment sphere and may lead to marginalisation and exclusion of minorities. On the other hand, knowledge of the State language enables minorities to have equal opportunities in public and professional life.

Adult persons belonging to national minorities have a responsibility to integrate into the wider national society through the acquisition of a proper knowledge of the State language. Often there is also a considerable demand for such language training among minorities. States on their part have the duty to provide for adequate opportunities for adult persons belonging to minorities to study the State language. Minority adult education curricula need to respond to the specific needs of the learners, and be developed through collaboration and consultation with representatives and experts from the respective minority groups. Discussions in this Session will concentrate on ways to ensure that State language training for adults is of good quality, financially affordable, and practically accessible.

The second dimension of adult education to be addressed in this Session relates to promoting awareness of the multi-ethnic nature of society and providing the skills required to work in such a society. Those dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity in their professional life - persons belonging to national minorities as well as those belonging to the majority - would benefit from training opportunities enabling them to cope with the challenges of diversity. Such training programmes usually aim at promoting understanding and co-operation between groups, addressing stereotypes and prejudices, enhancing the sensitivity to the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual environment and providing participants with tools and skills to improve their interaction with representatives of different groups. A number of participating States have gained valuable experience in this regard.

The following issues could be considered during the discussion:

- What measures have participating States taken to raise the level of State language proficiency among adult persons belonging to national minorities?
- What methodologies exist for measuring the language needs of adults from different minority background and for adapting State language education opportunities to the needs identified?
- What examples of good practice can be identified and promoted in terms of ensuring consultation and co-operation with minorities on issues related to the studying of the State language by adults?
- What are the good practices for participating States in striking the balance between promoting State language proficiency among adults and ensuring the linguistic rights of minorities?
- How can the effectiveness of State language teaching programmes for minorities be improved, in terms of ensuring a consistent strategy, raising the motivation of the target group, ensuring quality and sustainability of the programmes?
- When are targeted language training opportunities for specific occupational or professional groups such as civil servants or elected officials warranted and how should they be designed?
- What lessons learnt and good practice can be drawn from the implementation of training programmes on the challenges of diversity? What elements of such trainings

have proven particularly important? Which occupational and professional groups need or should benefit from such programmes?

- Should members of the majority and the minority groups attend all parts of such programmes together or is a differentiated approach warranted, taking into consideration the different situation and needs of the groups?
- What are the good practices in including diversity training elements into the system of mandatory or voluntary further education for specific professional or occupational groups?
- What methodologies exist to measure the practical and long-term effect training programmes on the challenges of diversity have upon participants?
- What are the institutional arrangements best suitable to provide for adult minority education? If the public authorities have no direct competence in the field of adult education, how can governments encourage and support the offering of training and education (State language training or training on diversity management) by private and non-governmental organizations?

16.00 – 16.30 Break

16.30 – 17.30 **CLOSING SESSION**

17.30 Reports by the Working Session Moderators
Close of Day 2