



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

INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE SOCIETIES

Presentation by
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to the
High-level seminar: Protection and promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies

[Check against delivery]

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Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

I appreciate the invitation to address this high-level seminar and welcome the initiative of the Council of Europe and Estonian Chairmanship to organize a discussion on this topic, which is timely amidst the ongoing discussions about diversity, migration and integration challenges—accompanied, unfortunately, by a disturbing rise in nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric, and actions that seem out of place in today's Europe.

There is much experience and expertise in this room. It is a reminder of the well-developed architecture in the Council of Europe of human rights including minority rights standards, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. The new *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers on the protection and promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies* is yet another important tool in this toolbox.

I also travel to countries that are not part of the Council of Europe—here I speak mainly about Central Asia—where instruments such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are unfortunately not applicable and tend not to be used as reference points by the authorities or persons belonging to national minorities. But even in the region covered by the Council of Europe, we know that having the mechanisms and standards in place is no guarantee that human rights in culturally diverse societies will be protected and promoted. Even in some countries where all the building blocks of democracy are supposedly in place, we see human rights coming under attack; human rights being presented as externally imposed or advocated by a select group; citizens not being fully aware of what human rights mean.

This concerns me not only because I am someone who cares about human rights. It concerns me as the head of an institution given a mandate to prevent conflicts over minority issues from occurring in the OSCE region.

Simply put, societies where human rights, including minority rights, are not protected and promoted are societies that are more vulnerable to tensions and conflict. They are societies where democratic institutions are not working and where public trust is eroded, where the rule of law is not functional. This does not make for long-term stability.

When societies are culturally diverse—as all societies in today’s Europe are—this does not automatically make conflict potential higher. But we see too often that when good governance is not a priority, exclusion or marginalization of certain groups worsens and frustration and resentment grow. Divisions between groups may be fostered and exploited for political gain.

The roots of conflict tend to be complex, and the solutions must be complex as well. Human rights, including minority rights, are at the foundation—a state cannot be said to be fulfilling its responsibilities if human rights are not respected. But we know that for sustainable, peaceful solutions, the state and other actors must build upon this foundation. They must work toward the integration of society—with a shared vision of a society where all members have equal opportunities to participate in various aspects of life.

The *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* issued by my institution in 2012 were an attempt to provide for OSCE participating States and other stakeholders a practical and balanced approach to putting that vision into practice. Most of the other thematic recommendations produced by my institution provide States with guidance on how to implement specific minority rights. The Ljubljana Guidelines build on those recommendations – they do not by any means replace them.

As the Guidelines state: “A stable society in which the dynamic processes of change take place without violence can only be achieved, maintained and further developed when the conditions to effectively exercise sovereignty are in place. In addition, sovereignty should be exercised according to the following principles: good and democratic governance, non-discrimination, effective equality, and respect for and promotion of human rights, including minority rights.”

As I often tell representatives of OSCE participating States when I meet with them: States must be the primary architects of integration policies. This is part of the fulfilment of their responsibilities as sovereign states. Integration is not an organic process that happens on its own: it must be facilitated and actively promoted with specific policies and measures. The Guidelines discuss what factors should guide states in designing and implementing those measures. Just as minority issues should not be treated in isolation, integration cuts across different policy areas, from media to security to socio-economic participation. Participation is

a principle as well as a key policy area: and participation cannot be effective if human rights, including minority rights, are not protected and promoted for all, and if the very important principle of non-discrimination is not observed. Similarly, my office has worked with countries to ensure that national strategies and other documents aimed at promoting human rights take into account the diversity of society and the situation of minorities in that context.

But integration is not only about rights; it is also about responsibilities. This includes the responsibility of both majorities and minorities to participate in the wider society, for example by learning the State language, while the State has the responsibility to ensure that there are adequate opportunities to do so. In a number of countries I facilitate pilot projects to demonstrate how such opportunities can be provided. After speaking with roomfuls of eager training participants I can easily counter those who might say: but minorities are not interested in learning the State language. But I also speak to concerned parents of schoolchildren who say, I want my child to learn the State language, but I want her to know the language of our community, her mother tongue. How can this be reconciled? Here my institution has experience promoting multilingual education as a tool for integration.

The practice of developing and adopting cross-cutting integration policies is, I am pleased to say, growing in the OSCE area. It is a practice I am helping to support in several OSCE participating States. The process can be difficult and may require compromise on sensitive issues. Most important is that consultations and discussions are as broad as possible, so the result has ownership and credibility. Of course no two integration policies should look alike, whether they are policies developed for different countries or by the same country in different time periods. Diversity itself is not static: we see a dynamic situation across the OSCE region today. We cannot put people in boxes, saying: you are this, you are that. One group cannot say, “We are the society, and you are the “other.”

This does not mean that targeted solutions are not needed for particular groups. Special measures may be exactly what are needed to ensure effective equality. But integration policies must also be about the whole of society—majorities and minorities, with identities that can be multi-layered and multiple, as well as changing over time.

There are no shortcuts to integration. It is not a process that can be artificially rushed and it cannot happen overnight. It must also be included in the education process, where during our

formative years we learn about each other, about the rights and responsibilities we all have and about the historical events that have shaped our shared and different pasts.

The more cohesive a society is already, the more resilient and better prepared it will be to take on new diversity challenges. We see in the OSCE region countries where divisions between “traditional” minorities and majorities persist alongside the arrival through migration of “new” minorities, in some cases putting additional stress on already fragile societies. Cutting corners by ignoring human rights or putting some rights above others for the sake of a short-term stability does society no favours in the long run. Rather, it undermines the very foundation of a stable society. The difficulties in coping with new arrivals should not be an excuse to put other aspects of interethnic relations at a low priority—quite the opposite.

The constant challenge is to adjust policies as needed, to keep channels of communication open and to include all stakeholders in decision-making. None of this will be easy, but it is the only way forward.