



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

OPENING REMARKS

by
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to the
Round Table on
**"Modernising Police and Promoting Integration:
Challenges for Multi-Ethnic Societies"**

[Check Against Delivery]

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Mr. Minister, Distinguished participants,

It is an honour for me to be able to address you today on the issue of policing in multi-ethnic societies in the context of police modernisation. Under your leadership, Mr Sotalinov, the Interior Ministry of Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated openness to new ideas. This has helped the country to make tangible progress in the complex process of police reform and the overall democratisation of the criminal justice system. Bearing this in mind, I feel it is especially appropriate that we should be discussing in Kyrgyzstan the question of how the modernisation of police can serve as the basis for promoting integration and inter-ethnic harmony in a multi-ethnic society.

The promotion of harmonious inter-ethnic relations is a laborious task that requires persistence and attention from all sides. I would therefore like to express my gratitude to the Interior Minister, General Major Murat Sotalinov, for his firm commitment to the police reform and his personal support for a number of initiatives – currently being implemented or planned – that foster positive relations between the different ethnic communities of Kyrgyzstan and the country's police service.

As you are probably aware, the mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) is one of conflict prevention in the area of inter-ethnic relations. Through the establishment of the office of the HCNM in 1992, OSCE participating States countered the destructive force of inter-ethnic conflict which threatens stability and peace in the OSCE region. In my capacity as the High Commissioner, I have been involved in a variety of OSCE States that have faced the twin challenges of developing democracy and of building stable societies based upon the principles of non-discrimination and human rights.

The practical philosophy applied to achieve this end is one of integration of the different ethnic communities within the State. We should be clear, however, that integration does not mean the forced assimilation of minorities nor their separation from society. Rather, I am concerned to find the middle ground: integration of different ethnic communities with respect for diversity. As High Commissioner, I strive to identify the best ways to accommodate the legitimate concerns of majorities and minorities; seeking the means by which they can build the national society together so that that the State is the common home for all – where none is treated as second class citizens.

A carefully designed policy of integration offers a way to ensure human rights, both of the majority and the minorities, and, thereby, to build stable and harmonious societies where ethnic division and tension could threaten unity and peace. Integration can make a vital contribution to tackling social exclusion, particularly as it affects minority communities. Of course, the exact nature of the measures that constitute integration will vary from society to society. Nonetheless, policing is a key element of successful policies of social integration.

The importance of democratic policing, particularly in multi-ethnic contexts, is enormous. A democratic police service is the guarantor of law and public safety. As such, the police operate at "street level" and have direct contact with all ethnic communities. They often represent the sole agency of the criminal justice system with which various ethnic communities ever come into contact. As a result, the police have the power to influence the attitudes and public perception of persons belonging to national minorities with regard to the Rule of Law in a state and its capacity to act in just, legitimate, and accountable ways. A police service that is representative of the society that it serves and responsive to concerns and wishes of all ethnic communities, has the potential to serve as an intra-state conflict prevention and resolution mechanism.

It was the recognition of the central role of policing in promoting harmonious inter-ethnic relations that led my office, together with the Strategic Police Matters Unit in the OSCE Secretariat, to gather a group of experts to elaborate the *Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies* which are available today to the round-table participants. The expert group assembled senior police officers, members of academia and representatives of international organisations and NGOs with expertise in the area. The Recommendations establish a detailed roadmap for building trust and confidence between the police service and persons belonging to national minorities, and the document covers such key topics as recruitment and representation, training and professional support, engagement with ethnic communities, operational practices and the prevention and management of conflict.

I would like to emphasize that the Recommendations are not about setting up a separate regime for policing minorities but about the application of the basic principles of democratic policing; such as responsiveness and accountability to the community, to the particular case of minority communities. The central message of the Recommendations is that good policing in multi-ethnic societies is dependent on the establishment of a

relationship of trust and confidence built on regular communication and practical co-operation between the police and the minorities. This principle applies equally to the relationship between police and the communities they serve, when they are not minorities. But it is particularly important in the case of minorities because there is an added risk of alienation. The recommended measures are, in this way, intended to improve the police service's operational effectiveness and its capacity to uphold the rule of law. In this sense, all parties involved – the police service and the ethnic communities – benefit from the practical co-operation and enhanced communication.

As is recognized in the Recommendations, a policy on minority policing needs to employ a holistic and integrated approach to all areas of policing activity and interaction with ethnic communities. Without prejudice to any of the other recommendations, I would nevertheless like to briefly elaborate on a number of specific provisions in the document which are particularly salient.

One crucial area for multi-ethnic policing, in my view, is to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities are represented in the police service. A representative police *service* has a number of comparative advantages if compared to a mono-ethnic police *force*. Better minority representation increases the operational effectiveness of the police. Minority police officers can more easily win the trust and confidence of their own communities. A police service that is seen to incorporate sections of society that are otherwise excluded or marginalised will be more likely to secure the co-operation of members of these communities. Victims will more readily report crimes. Minority communities will offer valuable intelligence and information while witnesses will more willingly co-operate with the police. The overall effect is enhanced community safety and a reduction in illegal activities in areas of minority concentration.

A more representative police service also has a symbolic meaning and enjoys enhanced legitimacy in the society it serves. The police service needs to be "perceived" to represent a broader political consensus if it is to secure legitimacy. Those responsible for maintaining law and order ought to be representative of their fellow citizens and be part of the communities they serve. The police service has to mirror the demographics of the population.

Recruitment, even in sufficient numbers, is however not enough. As suggested in the Recommendations, minority police officers often experience a sense of isolation from

other colleagues in the police service as well as from their own communities once they have joined the service. The end result of such isolation is a situation in which minority police officers have to deny their identity to fit in. This compromises the very goal of multi-ethnic policing. It is therefore important to put particular emphasis on the retention of minority police officers in the police service as well as their promotion. The perception that ethnic minority officers have little or no promotion prospects, which in turn, is believed to limit their chances of attaining the financial rewards associated with higher ranks in the police service needs to be overturned. It is also important to ensure that minority police officers are not compartmentalised into dealing exclusively with their own communities and need to be given the opportunity to develop their careers in diverse specialisms.

Linked to recruitment and retention is another area which merits our attention, i.e. dissemination of information. I have met many persons belonging to national minorities who might otherwise be attracted to a police service career but are deterred from doing so because of their perception that they will encounter discrimination and fail to progress; because of the lack of information about what the job actually entails; and/or because of the failure to understand the real nature of policing.

It is axiomatic that talking to people is an essential part of successful policing but it is a still nascent concept in some police services. In this regard, police-minority communication and mechanisms of interaction need to be established. There are a variety of methods that police can use for developing communication with minorities. Some methods, such as the use of leaflets or radio and television, essentially involve one-way communication and are particularly useful for conveying information. To reach minorities by these means, it is essential that the leaflets are printed in the minority languages and broadcasts in the mass media are also transmitted in minority languages. More valuable for building confidence and mutual understanding, however, are interactive methods that involve personal contact and communication between police and minorities. The Recommendations convincingly argue that regular police-minority dialogue assists the police service in building confidence within various ethnic groups and also contributes to an improved visibility and appreciation of the police among all ethnic communities.

I am also strongly convinced that changes in police practices and behaviour can be greatly facilitated by moulding police attitudes and values. In this regard, the culture

within the police services is a critical element to reflect upon. Xenophobic language or behaviour need to be rooted out from the police environment if better police-minority relations are to be established and retention of minority police officers secured. The very thought of reporting a crime to a nationalistic or racist police officer or working in a xenophobic environment will kill otherwise good initiatives.

I have therefore always attached great importance to the training of police officers in inter-ethnic relations. Any training programme should be directly related to the specific circumstances and the demands of the police and should advise the police on procedures and modes of behaviour appropriate for dealing with minorities. On the other hand, training activities must also develop the trainees' attitudes and values and tackle their stereotypes and prejudices. In my experience the implementation of such training activities has proved that they do, without a doubt, make a significant difference in police work.

I am happy to report on this occasion that Kyrgyzstan and the HCNM are actively co-operating in the area of training through the Osh-based "Training Centre in Management of Inter-ethnic Relations for Police Officers and Cadets" opened in February 2006. The Centre is based at the premises of the Osh Secondary Specialised Police School and runs regular courses for operational police officers and police cadets with a view to increasing their sensitivity to the multi-ethnic society they live and operate in. The courses are specifically tailored to police needs and provide police officers and cadets with the knowledge and tools to support their interaction with persons belonging to national minorities. Later in the day you will hear from the Osh Centre trainers about the design and provisional results of these training activities.

As a final point, let me turn to an issue often at the centre of public debate in almost all of the societies where I am engaged, i.e. the issue of language. This issue is often overlooked in the context I have been discussing here but the police, too, need to ensure they have the capability to communicate with minorities in minority languages wherever possible by recruitment and training of multilingual staff, and the use of qualified interpreters. Furthermore, one has to avoid the situation in which insufficient proficiency in the State language is used to squeeze minority police officers out of the police service. Again, training and professional support play a vital role in the efforts to promote the use of the State language in police work while respecting the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished participants,

This was just a sample of the practical advice contained in the Recommendations. However, all the measures need to be complemented by a wider national strategy to promote integration and to build a successful multi-ethnic society. This should include processes to encourage participation by persons belonging to minorities in the political and economic life of the State by introducing initiatives and policies in fields such as education, language, political representation and broadcasting which would go a long way in tackling poverty and exclusion. Progress in the broader aspects of integration will make it easier to introduce measures needed for multi-ethnic policing.

Since Kyrgyzstan gained independence in the early 1990s, the country has moved forward towards the goal of fostering harmony and mutual understanding amongst the national communities of Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, there are still areas where action is needed to further improve inter-ethnic relations. The successful implementation of measures in these areas will strengthen the democratic basis of Kyrgyzstan's political system and would both benefit your country and establish it as a State leading the process of democratisation in Central Asia.

It goes without saying that police modernisation in general and building a multi-ethnic police service in particular will be no easy task. The reform now being envisaged does however offer a unique opportunity to demonstrate political will and leadership by setting out a clear "vision" of the role of police in building and sustaining an effective democratic multi-ethnic society. It is also vital to consult widely in order to win multi-party and multi-ethnic consensus on this vision so that Kyrgyzstan can draw upon the wealth of skills and knowledge found amongst all of its citizens. In this regard, I am convinced that discussions of the kind taking place at this round table today will make the task far less daunting. With this in mind, I would like to wish you every success with the remainder of the round table.

Thank you for your attention.