



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

Address by
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to the

High-level conference
“National minority identities in diverse societies: European perspectives”

[Check against delivery]

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Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address such a distinguished audience on this very important topic. Matters related to national minorities in the OSCE area are high on my agenda. They are also high on the agenda of the international community at large. In this regard, allow me to commend the excellent work carried out by Hungary during its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in promoting the effective protection of national minorities, while seeking to strengthen political, legal, social and cultural cohesion, and combatting discrimination.

Indeed, promoting and protecting the rights, interests and aspirations of national minorities is not only a matter of moral obligation and responsibility for all of us, it is also a precondition for the well-being, peace and security of our respective societies and across borders.

In just over one year, my institution will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the appointment of the first OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. For the last three decades, despite continuously changing circumstances and evolving contexts, successive High Commissioners have been dealing with a set of recurring issues in areas such as language, education, policing, access to justice, the media, and participation in economic and political life. When I took up my mandate in December last year, I saw that while significant advances have been made in these areas, some of the recurring issues faced by previous High Commissioners are still relevant today and will continue to demand our attention and collaborative action going forward.

Let us take, for example, the issue of language. This remains a sensitive issue. Having said that, I also witness a positive trend whereby national minorities increasingly make efforts to improve their knowledge of the State language. It is therefore important that the States in which minorities live acknowledge these efforts and, for their part, create

optimal conditions for national minorities to feel that they are an integral part of society by promoting and protecting minority languages and culture.

Education continues to be key, both for the integration of diverse society and for conflict prevention. However, this is only possible if education policies are balanced and inclusive, with equal space for learning the State language *and* minority languages.

Ensuring the effective participation of national minorities in public affairs and all aspects of social, economic and cultural life continues to be a precondition for strengthened resilience and increased stability within our diverse societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since I took up my mandate, I noted significant efforts on the part of the OSCE participating States to promote integration of diverse societies. I am aware that this does not always come easy. Yet, it is important to maintain these efforts and, at times, amplify them.

The diversity of our societies is increasing and will likely continue to increase. The implications of this diversity cannot and should not be over-simplified to bad or good, negative or positive. The experience of my institution proves the following:

If the growing diversity within our societies is left unattended or not governed well, then we risk seeing an increase in divisions along the lines of identity, leading to exclusion and marginalization, and creating preconditions for tensions, thus challenging security within and between States. If, on the other hand, diversity is given its due attention – by governments, policymakers, practitioners, businesses, and civil society – then the benefits of diversity can be harnessed. This will make our societies more cohesive and resilient, and therefore less vulnerable to internal or external threats.

This is where the European and international multilateral institutions can offer significant added value:

While my position was designed to serve as an instrument for conflict prevention within the OSCE's politico-military dimension, the so-called "human dimension" is embedded within the DNA of my work, because security and respect for human rights, including minority rights, are tightly interlinked. This is where my institution is closely co-operating with the Council of Europe both at the leadership level, as well as through technical consultations. I discussed several matters of mutual interest related to national minorities with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe yesterday. Indeed, there is a great degree of complementarity across both our organizations. Not being a monitoring instrument, my office values the in-depth assessment and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Likewise, the importance of co-operating with the United Nations on matters related to national minorities cannot be overestimated. Later today, I will travel to New York to co-host, together with my dear colleague Dr. Fernand de Varennes, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, an event on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Economic Participation of Minorities. The UN is a key partner for my institution and, while in New York, I will be having a series of consultations with the UN leadership on ways to advance and strengthen our co-operation on national minority-related matters.

The rationale behind sharing these examples is to illustrate a point that is key for our deliberations on ideas for future action. In the OSCE, we strongly believe that only a comprehensive approach towards security – one that encompasses the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension – can strengthen our societies.

This is why I believe there is a political imperative for our joint collaboration on national minority-related matters and diversity governance in general: this is the agenda for the 21st century.

It is why we should be seeking out and supporting the leaders of the future on these matters – those among us who champion the commitment to promote a vision of peace and stability rooted in human rights and minority rights.

And this is why, going forward, I will continue to encourage, assist and support relevant actors to enhance such leadership and co-operation for the sake of inclusive, cohesive and peaceful societies.

For this, my institution is at your disposal. I thank you for your attention.