



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

## **ADDRESS**

by  
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the  
**OSCE Mediterranean Conference 2017**

**[Check against delivery]**

Palermo, Italy – 25 October 2017

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate greatly the opportunity to address you today. Historic and beautiful Palermo, set in the heart of the Mediterranean, has served as a crossroads of civilizations since ancient times. It is in every respect a fitting venue for a high-level discussion on integration, a topic of relevance to every country represented here. I intend to use the opportunity to highlight for you why we should pay more attention to management of diverse societies, and how we can better use the tools already at our disposal to bolster our common security and stability.

European history is built upon the currents and tides of changing population dynamics. National minorities are nothing new, nor is the migration of peoples across borders. As long as there have been States, there has been the need to find ways of managing respect for the differences within them – be they ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious – in a constructive and peaceful way. Where this is done well, we find strong and stable societies, and all sectors of the population, even though they be diverse, feel invested in a common future. But when groups are excluded, or start to feel that way, public trust is eroded, and the tension levels quickly tick upwards. We may see an increase in nationalist, separatist or xenophobic rhetoric as warning signs of worse to come.

It is important that we understand what is meant by “integration of diverse societies” and why it is important. I have a short animated presentation of about two minutes developed by my office that I would seek your indulgence to play.

So, what exactly are *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* and what do we do with them?

Over the years, successive High Commissioners have built-up a wealth of institutional knowledge through their interactions with governments of participating States on how to best to equip ourselves to manage diversity. This knowledge results from almost 25 years of conflict prevention diplomacy: providing policy and legal advice, transferring knowledge, supporting good practice and bringing people together to lower political tensions.

The Recommendations and Guidelines of the High Commissioner on National Minorities crystallize this knowledge. These publications are essentially toolkits for participating States to adapt and use to meet their own needs.

The Ljubljana Guidelines are a sort of umbrella document that aim at striking a *balance* between the obligations of the State towards persons belonging to national minorities, which include respecting human and minority rights, and ensuring stability: persons belonging to national minorities should also understand their own responsibilities towards ensuring the cohesion of the State. This includes full participation in State life – properly learning the official language as well as their mother tongue, and playing a full role in the political, economic and social life of the State. Expectation cuts both ways.

Integration is a continuous process, rather than an end-point. There are no short cuts, but the good news is that the process itself generates immediate rewards in terms of State cohesion. My institution firmly supports respect for the rights of national minorities, but it does not believe in isolationism. Living side by side but living entirely separate lives is not good enough; there must be genuine interaction and mutual benefits. This is how cohesion is created. To take education as an example, national minorities should have the opportunity to learn and to learn in their mother tongue, but they should also have the

opportunity – and the obligation – to learn the official language to fluency. There should also be regular opportunities for children of different groups to study and play together.

It is not an exaggeration to stress that the proper management of diversity is key to the stability of Europe. If the Recommendations of High Commissioners, such as The Ljubljana Guidelines and *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* had been followed in every case, the number of conflicts and potential conflicts around Europe would be greatly reduced, and I would venture to say, perhaps even eliminated.

Where, in my judgement, there are tensions, I do expect that participating States will grant me full access and co-operation, as per the mandate which I have been asked to discharge. Let me stress that I am not a reporting body. I stand ready to assist through quiet diplomacy, which could be facilitation of contact between those who disagree, or through provision of expertise and support. I trust that this will be welcomed by the participating States themselves.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe has always been exciting and diverse, an evolving tapestry of cultures and languages. Our rich heritage of diversity carries with it a wealth of ideas and philosophies, many of them with deep roots in shared Mediterranean culture.

We have faced such challenges in the past and we face them again now. Integration of diverse societies is our best option if we are to ensure stability

and security for this and for future generations. The opportunities and the tools exist. We should use them.

Thank you for your attention.