



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

ADDRESS

by

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to the

HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

[Check against delivery]

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Warsaw for the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Over the years since its inception, this annual meeting has become an important meeting place for the actors from governments and civil society, and today it forms the backbone of the review mechanism for the human dimension in the OSCE. Let me first of all express my gratitude to the OSCE Chairmanship, Secretariat and, in particular, our friends in the ODIHR here in Warsaw, for organizing this meeting and for inviting me to address the plenary session as well as a special session dedicated to the topic of national minorities, which will be held on 4 October.

Reflecting on the aim of our meetings here, I believe it is important to go back to the roots and revisit the fundamental ideas of our Organization. The core business of the OSCE has from the start been the same: to prevent conflict within and between the participating States. At the end of the day, whether this has been achieved is the basis on which our work shall be judged. In my mandate, conflict prevention is further specified as providing early warning and early action. Since I took up my position four years ago, this has been the focus of my work.

It has become a tradition that the High Commissioner on National Minorities takes part during the HDIM. As most of you will know, my work with national minorities is in no way restricted to the human dimension. Rather, the core of my mandate on early warning and early action is firmly rooted in the political-military dimension. However, to address conflict at its roots is inextricably linked to the effective protection of the rights of minorities. Therefore, early action often relates to the protection and promotion of minority rights. However, the question of national minorities is multidimensional and it requires a multidimensional approach. Ethnic tensions and potential conflicts are part of the security considerations of States, and respecting the fundamental rights of all members and communities of society are also linked to this. National minorities are an issue of both domestic politics and inter-State co-operation. For these reasons, preventing conflicts and achieving security often require a focus on the protection of rights, and promotion of social cohesion and territorial integrity is contingent upon the respect for and accommodation of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Therefore, in focusing on furthering the rights of national minorities, I engage the full spectrum of rights, ranging from linguistic and cultural rights to effective equality and participation. The projects and advice that I offer include how to achieve integrated education for children of national minorities, as well as how to address the issue of statelessness and inadequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities. I believe there can be no stability without full respect for basic rights. Neglect and suppression is, in the long run, bound to fuel grievances and social unrest. Lasting peace, stability and prosperity are best served by democratization and integration of our societies, benefitting majorities and minorities alike. Thus, the human dimension is ultimately a *sine qua non* for building this lasting peace.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the next two weeks, we shall be discussing challenges as well as achievements in fulfilling human dimension commitments. I hope we shall be able to identify ways in which further progress can be made and which in turn will contribute to the greater peace, stability and prosperity of the OSCE area. In this regard, I want to highlight the importance of integration

of society and full and effective participation of all within the framework of a democratic, multi-ethnic State. The effective participation in public affairs of persons belonging to national minorities remains a key challenge. This relates to questions of citizenship, data collection and forms of political representation, and I look forward to hearing the conclusions of the panels that will address these themes.

Effective participation in public affairs is linked to the right to participate in the political processes of the State, which, at the national level, is generally tied to having citizenship. However, access to citizenship for all permanent residents without undue obstacles unfortunately remains a problem in several OSCE participating States, and is a question where practical progress is urgently needed. In the case of Roma, especially, the situation is precarious. In some cases they continue to face problems, even in civic registration, not having valid ID documents and are thus hampered in their access not only to citizenship, but also to basic rights and public services.

Another key concern for participation in public affairs is the possibility for persons belonging to national minorities to effectively participate in the decision-making bodies and public institutions. Such participation requires not mere symbolic presence in the structures, but adequate representation, which, although it is not a mathematical equation, relates to the proportion of the population of different groups. The issues of how to ensure an effective voice to representatives of minorities, with the means to have an influence on key decisions in the society in which they live, are worthy of an honest and exploratory stock-taking of measures to date and their effects. It is my hope that the panels later on will prompt a useful exchange of experiences in this field, so that the discussions we have do not merely repeat accepted principles, but help to identify ways to make real progress.

In order to effectively address these and other challenges, States need reliable data. Whether and how to collect data on identity is complex and at times controversial. However, there is a growing recognition that effective and targeted policies can only be formulated on the basis of evidence, and thus require objective and disaggregated data. This year, many countries are conducting censuses. This is not inconsequential for State-minority relations. It is important that the questions relating to ethnicity and identity are formulated in a correct way, and that the enumeration process and data processing carries the legitimacy and trust of the entire population, including minorities. Furthermore, it is important to monitor the possible consequences of changing demographic figures, also at the local level, including the effects of the rights and entitlements of national minorities. Data collection is an essential tool for maximizing benefits to all. At the same time, if conducted without due awareness to both political and personal sensitivities, it may turn out to be a cause of concern and tension.

Mr. Chairperson,

As I stated initially, the HDIM has become an important meeting place and, as the Secretary General reminded us, it is also a unique form of peer review, where the participating States can take stock and encourage better implementation of the commitments they have all undertaken. I hope and believe that this exercise can further the values that are at the core of our Organization and which are crucial to our common future. I wish you success in your work, and look forward to seeing you again during our session on minority related issues on 4 October.

Thank you for your attention.