



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

**CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE FIELD OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**  
**AND THE LINK TO SUSTAINABLE GLOBALIZATION**

Lecture by  
**Knut Vollebaek**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

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Thank you for inviting me to address The European International Model United Nations Conference today and to talk about my activities as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. Is there really a link between the work I do in conflict prevention in the field of national minorities' and your theme "Striving for Sustainable Globalization"?

Some twenty years ago the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by my compatriot Gro Harlem Brundtland, defined "sustainable development" as one that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition may, as I see it, also be used when we talk about globalization. How can we meet today's needs and the demands for economic growth in more and more open economies and at the same time make sure that we – and eventually you – preserve the necessary foundation for a stable future. Your input is key to our sustainable future, since you will not only inherit the past from your parents, but be expected to help build the future for your own children.

Increasingly, world leaders are talking not just about "sustainable" but also "inclusive globalization". Indeed, in the original definition of "sustainable development", inequality and environmental deterioration are perceived as being equally important and interdependent conditions for sustainability. This can be applied to inequality both within countries and between countries. Inequality within countries, aggravated by discrimination on ethnic grounds, is particularly dangerous. It generates tension and ferments a feeling of exclusion from the fruits of globalization. In many ways, my mandate was conceived in order to address such problems in majority-minority relations within States.

While my mandate originally was directed towards the ethnic groups that had ended up as minorities because wars or international treaties, globalization has led to another group of minorities, namely the migrants. We cannot address sustainable globalization without addressing the integration of "new minorities" or migrants into our societies. To my mind migration is one of the most important phenomena of our time, as challenging as climate change or the fight against terrorism.

The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be described in one word - interconnected. The Internet, SMS and cheap air travel are obvious examples of this. Another is the effect of migration and movement of people on our societies. Something, I think, we have not yet fully realized or are able to comprehend. The fact that environmental degradation and pollution lead to the melting of the Arctic ice cap, which in turn creates problems for countless countries all over the world, is yet another sign of how interconnected we are. These and many other examples demonstrate that it is no longer possible to believe that we can live on "isolated islands" and pretend not to be affected by events happening outside our own doors or even our borders.

Europe realized this in different circumstances 15 years ago. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe with 56 participating States from Vancouver to Vladivostok traces its origins to the détente phase of the early 1970s, when the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was established to serve as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West.

The end of the Cold War and the spread of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe were seen as an unparalleled opportunity to establish lasting peace, not just on the basis of converging interests but on the basis of shared values. Many believed that wars were a thing of the past and that Western liberal democracies had won a final victory over communist

regimes. They accepted, as Francis Fukuyama claimed in his famous book, that we had reached “the End of History”. These were optimistic and hopeful years in Europe and the attendant aspirations were epitomised in the 1990 “Charter of Paris for a New Europe”, which euphorically declared the end of the era of confrontation and division of Europe and reaffirmed the commitment to develop mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts among the participating States.

The threat of the “classic” inter-State confrontation over territory or economic resources has indeed diminished. Today competing interests of States are usually prevented from developing into armed conflicts. However, in the 1990’s this positive trend was soon countered by the emergence of a new type of conflict, generated by internal tensions and frictions within States, and often manifested itself as disputes between different groups – based on ethnicity or religion.

The Balkan wars in the 1990s were instrumental in the decision taken by the CSCE in 1992 to create the position of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. The fundamental thinking behind my mandate is to make the High Commissioner a central element in the OSCE's overall mission to prevent violent conflicts. As it is generally perceived that many conflicts in Europe arise from inter-ethnic tensions, the High Commissioner has been tasked to focus on such situations. And because my role is part of the security dimension of the OSCE, my mandate is to provide early warning and to take early action at the earliest possible stage on issues relating to tensions involving national minorities, which in the judgement of the High Commissioner have the potential to develop into conflicts.

The philosophy applied in practice to achieve this conflict prevention goal is one of integration of the different ethnic communities within the State. Let me, however, make it clear that integration does not mean the assimilation of minorities nor their separation from society. Rather, I seek to find the middle ground, integration 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 in such a way that the State is the common home for them all, where none are treated as second class citizens.

The exact nature of the measures that constitute integration will vary from society to society and a different balance will be appropriate in each case. Nonetheless, some form of integration, avoiding the extremes of forced assimilation on the one hand and separatism on the other, is likely to be the best way to promote social cohesion and reduce the risk of conflict.

While my job involves a great deal of listening and talking, I do not want to be seen as just a proliferator of words. This is why over the years the various High Commissioners have developed some thematic guidelines and practical projects in the field of language teaching, minority language broadcasting, civil servant training and multi-ethnic policing in order to bring communities together and help them build a common home. I would like to recommend that you visit the High Commissioner's website at [www.osce-hcnm.org/](http://www.osce-hcnm.org/) and read about these initiatives in greater detail.

As many of you are aware, there is no general agreement on what constitutes a (national) minority, not within the OSCE or elsewhere. My distinguished predecessor, Max van der Stoel, once famously remarked that “the existence of a minority is a question of fact and not of definition.” In his view, “a minority is a group with linguistic, ethnic or cultural

characteristics, which distinguish it from the majority. Secondly, a minority is a group which usually not only seeks to maintain its identity, but also tries to give stronger expression to that identity.”

Although my mandate was conceived by the participating States to deal primarily with the consequences of the nation-building in the wake of the world wars of the last century, the collapse of autocratic empires and the dissolution of the former USSR and Yugoslavia, one cannot turn a blind eye to a more recent development, namely migration. Many ethnically homogeneous countries have undergone or are experiencing shifts in their ethnic composition. Many migrants, contrary to the expectations of the host States, have decided to settle and become naturalized.

Economic globalization and easier access to travel, ageing populations, labour shortages in certain industries in Western Europe, reunification of families and humanitarian crises have all contributed to the inevitable change in Europe's linguistic and religious landscape. According to statistics, some three million long-term migrants arrived in the OECD countries in 2005 alone.

You may think that this phenomenon is taking place primarily in Western Europe, to which millions of migrants flock in search of a better life. It is, however, an OSCE-wide phenomenon. Immigration of citizens from the new EU Member States to Western Europe is a very visible development today. The booming economies of Russia and Kazakhstan for example, are also attracting millions of labour migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Let us accept the reality: our towns and cities have inevitably changed and a new wall cannot be erected to stop this process. In many parts of Europe, the public is apprehensive about being “swamped” by refugees and illegal migrants from less-developed countries. Xenophobia, extreme nationalism and racism are on the rise. Right-wing populists are playing on the fears of the majority that the defining elements of its identity and way of life will be lost. It hardly comes as a surprise that migrants and their children feel unwelcome, disenchanted and discriminated against. This disillusionment creates fertile ground for religious and political extremism to grow.

A sense of being excluded and unwelcome may also be partly due to a political discourse we hear all too often in many Western European countries. Namely that “immigration has failed” and that this failure is the fault of the migrants who allegedly have not made enough effort to integrate. However, it is my experience that integration processes are complicated and that they do not lend themselves to “quick fixes”. Instead, as the EU's Common Basic Principles on Integration put it, “integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States”. Bearing this in mind, we certainly have to intensify our efforts to make our societies more inclusive for everyone. We cannot allow our societies to become fractured with communities existing in parallel worlds. The cost of failure, as we have all unfortunately learnt over the past years, is high.

It is my firm view that there are lessons learnt from the experience of integrating national minority communities in the OSCE region that can be applied to the newly emerging migrant communities. This is not a matter of extending national minority rights to the new migrants, but is a way of examining immigration from the point of view of good governance.

A study carried out in 2006 sponsored by the High Commissioner highlights the achievements of some OSCE participating States and the challenges they face in areas such as economic

opportunities, political participation, equality and anti-discrimination, education, health care and housing. The study calls for greater efforts to combat discrimination and intolerance and identifies best practices in ensuring the effective integration of “new minorities” in political, economic, social and cultural life.

Europe's complex ethnic landscape has left us with an immense wealth of linguistic and cultural diversity, which makes our countries most rewarding places to live and work. Migration is adding to this heterogeneity. Although certainly a source of strength and an asset, ethnic diversity has to be supported by a framework of policies and tools that will produce pleasant and respectful human environments, where different cultures and religions are appreciated and valued, and equal opportunities and rights are guaranteed for all.

This European International Model United Nations Conference should therefore include the subject of migration in its discussions. I believe that a major challenge for all of us in the future will be how we address the effects of migration. Namely, the pressure this migration puts on the environment and the social fabric of countries to which the migrants migrate, and the effects on the economies the migrants leave behind to find better opportunities elsewhere. For us present here today, our main challenge will be the issue of integration, i.e. how to make sure that we all have a place in society where we can play a meaningful role. That is the best weapon against terrorism.

Thank you for your attention.