



IPI SPEAKER SERIES

**Promoting Integration and Preventing Conflict in Multiethnic Societies:
Challenges and Opportunities**

Featuring

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Transcript edited by IPI

Terje Rød-Larsen:

Good afternoon everybody. It's a great pleasure to welcome you to the International Peace Institute's Trygve Lie Center and to this IPI Speaker Series on promoting integration and preventing conflict in multiethnic societies.

Our guest today is Knut Vollebaek, the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, also known as the OSCE. The purpose of the IPI speaker series is to provide a platform for key policy makers and leaders in international affairs to share their experience with the diplomatic community here in New York.

Today, we are addressing an issue which is at the very heart of political agendas in many countries, namely the challenges involved in balancing effective integration with a respect for diversity and the protection of minority rights. We all know too well what happens in societies where minorities are systematically excluded, and where tensions between different ethnic groups are left unaddressed. These challenges become even greater in our interconnected and globalized world.

Today, our societies are becoming increasingly ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse. As a result, we must make sure that our policies, tools, and mechanisms for integration are not only effective but also fair, and that ultimately promote a society where minority and majority can live peacefully side by side.

This is, of course, not an easy task, and I'm looking forward to hearing more from our speaker today on how OSCE is working to support

countries with their integration policies and preventing conflict in multiethnic society.

The post of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was established in the year of 1992. The High Commissioner's mandate is to provide early warning, and to take appropriate early action with regards to, and I'm quoting, "tensions involving national minority issues which have not yet developed beyond an early warning stage, but in the judgment of the High Commissioner, have the potential to develop into a conflict within the OSCE area."

Ambassador Vollebaek has held the position as the OSCE high commissioner since July 2007, and prior to his current and very important role, he has served his native country, Norway, in several distinguished positions, including as foreign minister between 1997 and 2000, and I should add here that I had the privilege of serving under him. He has also served as ambassador of Norway to the United States.

And with those few words, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you, Knut, and to give you the floor for your remarks. Knut, the floor is yours.

Knut Vollebaek:

Thank you, Terje. Let me then begin by thanking the IPI and you personally for the invitation for the possibility to discuss with you challenges and opportunities that face me, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities today.

HCNM, as we call it, is in many ways a unique multilateral institution whose sole purpose is to prevent conflicts and promote peaceful relations, both within and between states, a purpose which, I believe, also is shared by the IPI.

Conflict is a moving target. In the early 1990s, when the High Commissioner was conceived, the world seemed suddenly to have discovered the power of identity and the violence it could generate. The era of interstate conflict seemed to have ended with the end of the Cold War, and taken by surprise, we were witnessing the rise of internal interethnic warfare, which turned neighbors into enemies, civilians into combatants, and criminals into heroes. The belief in the viability and stability of a multiethnic state was fundamentally shaken.

About a decade later, the conflict came to be associated with transnational terrorism and religious fundamentalism, both at home and abroad. The tragedy suffered by this city on 9/11 once again made us all rethink the nature of modern conflict, and the lack of effective mechanisms at our disposal to either prevent or respond to it.

Today, the world is once again watching with bewilderment and with a mix of euphoria and caution the civil unrest engulfing the Arab world, shaking once impermeable authoritarian regimes. As the conflict becomes more elusive, the ability to predict and prevent it becomes ever so more challenging.

In fact, the role of the international community and the nature of international intervention have proven to be the most divisive and inconclusive questions thrown by conflicts of the post Cold War era. My institution, the High Commission on National Minorities, is the OSCE's

most intrusive mechanism. I would even say it is an embodiment of international intervention, albeit of a peaceful nature.

According to my mandate, the High Commissioner can get involved in all cases without seeking permission from the Permanent Council or a participating state in a situation that, as Terje referred to, in his judgment represent a threat to the security and stability within the OSCE region. The involvement of the HCNM as a rule touches upon the most sensitive of political matters for any state, namely, influencing the processes of state and nation building.

I have personally commented on state constitutions, on citizenship policies, on language laws, on media laws, on territorial and non-territorial forms of self-governance, on ways of organizing party lists, and on involving national minorities in public and political life. More often than ever, I have intervened in education policies of participating states, visiting schools as much as government institutions. The intervention in the case of the HCNM consists mainly of advice, which takes the form of recommendations and follow-up visits. I send letters, not troops, but they, too, go to the heart of both human security and the national security of the state.

It has been noted by scholars that the HCNM is a child of its times. If we were to renegotiate the HCNM's mandate today, both its independence and intrusiveness would probably be first to go. The HCNM was set up in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse and was underpinned, not only by the fear of ethnonational conflict spreading all around Europe, but also by optimism about the possibilities of multilateral diplomacy. In addition, the mandate reflected the growing acceptance among states that human rights is a matter of international concern and not simply a domestic affair of an individual state.

The OSCE participating states made a forceful declaration to disaffect, in what is known as the Moscow Document, which states that commitments undertaken in the human dimension, and I quote, "are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states, and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned." This was an important political statement, recognizing the international dimension of human rights and opposing the principle of absolute non-intervention.

Even though the HCNM was a response to the challenges of the 1990s, it remains a highly relevant institution, both in the same, as well as in new ways.

First, the experience of the HCNM shows that instability within states translates into insecurity between states. As my predecessor Rolf Ekeus once noted, and I quote him, "a society at peace with itself is more likely to be at peace with its neighbors." Managing ethnocultural diversity in a democratic way is one of the fundamental preconditions for peace in today's world, as states are becoming more diverse by the hour.

Second, the experience of the HCNM also demonstrates that violation of human rights, including identity rights of persons belonging to national minorities could lead to tensions and even violence. Protection of minority rights is a prerequisite for preventing conflicts and ensuring stability and security of our societies.

I have discovered that sometimes the most violent of conflicts have been triggered by an inability to speak one's mother tongue, or have one's culture recognized and respected. This causes a vicious circle of minority communities contesting legitimacy and integrity of states in which they reside, and by doing so, weakening and further undermining state capacity to respond and accommodate minority needs and interests. Protection of minority rights is often a precondition for building sustainable peace in any multiethnic society. It is, I believe, an important lesson that should inform any contemporary discussion on rights and security.

Third, we have to admit that protection of rights and accommodation of difference, how very important, may not be sufficient. We need to actively promote integration of our increasingly diverse societies. We need to build overarching, inclusive civic identities that would not replace but supplement particular ethnocultural affiliations we as individuals may have.

The United States is often evoked as an example of how a sense of common nationhood can be forged around civic values and political principles as opposed to ethnic conceptions of culture and identity. In both old and new Europe, this is more difficult, however, since past traditions of ethnonationalism prevail and make it particularly challenging to move beyond what Amartya Sen calls plural monoculturalism to true multiculturalism. In addition, the peace accords that have ended ethnic violence in places such as southeast Europe have also led to reaffirmation of ethnic divisions that, in time, have solidified and become increasingly difficult to overcome. Ironically, deals that have brought peace also may have sewn seeds of future conflicts. This is why integration with respect for diversity that you also referred to, Terje, is the basis upon which the HCNM's conflict prevention strategy is founded.

At a more general philosophical level, this means finding a working balance between minority rights on the one hand and sovereign rights of states on the other, between ethnocultural self-assertion and self-determination of groups and territorial integrity of states, between social cohesion and growing ethnocultural diversity. At the more practical policy level, this means finding the right balance between teaching of the state language to persons belonging to national minorities and providing education in another tongue, between encouraging minority participation through regional or ethnic parties as well as through their inclusion into mainstream party lists, allowing cross-border exchanges with so-called kin states and accepting their support in the spheres of culture and education while making sure that this does not lead to the outsourcing of minority protection from states of residence to kin states, to neighboring states.

The experience of the HCNM shows that balancing between those trends that seem to be pulling in different directions is not only possible, but is also an essential precondition for achieving sustainable peace and security, both within and between states. I often prefer not to speak about integration of minorities into societies, but rather about integration of societies. This means identifying the beneficiaries of integration policies as being multiethnic states and societies as a whole, rather than specific groups.

Traditional national minorities I have been working with often challenge the hierarchical relationship which tends to develop between majority and minority communities, and which places responsibility solely on minorities to change and adapt. I believe integration works as a process based on partnership rather than on a preconceived outcome. It requires all members of society, both from the majority and from the minority communities to adapt when necessary, establish effective channels of communication, and learn how to engage in mutually beneficial social relations.

If we look at the experience of many post-communist states, we will notice progress achieved through significant changes, the normalization of interethnic relations and decreasing instances of conflict occurred not without considerable transformations that both majority and minority communities have to undergo. Once fighting parties now share seats in parliaments and government coalitions. The situation is far from perfect, but the change is noteworthy. It occurred on the one hand by opening out the majority community to the inclusion of minority cultures, and on the other, by reciprocal opening of minorities to a state and to the participation in public and political life. This has been a mutually transformative process, expanding the range of values of all involved.

An indispensable mechanism through which such transformation can occur and be sustained is education. It remains the central vehicle through elaborating and transmitting the values we want future generations to absorb and believe in. It is through education that we can expect children to learn how to be respectful, tolerant, and fair citizens who will ensure that traditions of pluralism and democracy are maintained and further developed. It is through education that students learn how to question stereotypes and combat prejudice, how to deal with multiple perspectives and develop critical thinking. Schools that teach the history and culture of all members of society to their pupils, not only through books, but also through socialization and the fostering of bonds of friendship are laying the solid foundation for the future of their countries.

It is for this reason that I have argued strongly against the trend of segregated education along ethnic lines, a trend that seems to have become prevalent in many postconflict societies. Education, I believe, is a question of security. Long-term costs of separation are too high to be allowed to continue or to be encouraged. Integrated education promotes not only goals of personal achievement and growth, but also collective goals that cannot be easily measured by exams or standardized tests. The benchmark ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* made it clear that education was not just an individual right. It was, and I quote, "the very foundation of good citizenship." It should teach us skills and habits of democracy: tolerance, fairness, compromise, and more. And in societies that are multiethnic, it should also build our capacity to interact and communicate with different races, cultures, and religions.

Preventing conflict and promoting integration, however, is a multidimensional process. In addition to the inclusive and pluralistic system of education, it requires the system of good democratic governance, which should provide for equal opportunities and inspire

confidence, and indeed, loyalty towards the state. It requires open yet responsible media that does not perpetuate stereotypes and hatred. It is contingent upon participation of all, majorities and minorities alike, in the running of the state, and ultimately, it is about the ability to combine and complement ethnocultural and civic elements of identity. No matter how often the headlines change, and how different so-called new types of conflict appear from the earlier ones, these, I believe, will remain fundamental aspects of any conflict prevention strategy that aims at long term sustainable results. Thank you, and good luck.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Knut, for that very comprehensive, clear, and enlightening overview of the issue at hand, and also thank you very much for giving us an idea about the scope and giving us insight in the important, I observe, the critically important work you are doing. May I now open the floor for questions, criticisms, views, if you could raise your hand and please state your name and your affiliation when you take the floor, I see a lady there, I can't remember the name, on the right hand side who's raising her hand.

Pim Valdre:

Thank you. Pim from IPI. Thank you so much for this very interesting presentation. In terms of your mandate, could you speak a little bit more about what tools and mechanisms you have at your disposal for early warning, and to find simmering tensions before they escalate into conflict? And secondly, can you also speak a little bit about what the OSCE is doing, and your role in solving interethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan?

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Pim. Knut?

Vollebaek:

We are discussing our tools, so to say, because it is important, as you understand, according to my mandate to detect conflicts as early as possible. We do it differently in different countries. We have, in some countries, we have a monitoring network, particularly in areas with minorities, because my mandate, to a certain degree, I would say, is restricted to conflict between minorities and majorities. And there may be other reasons for a conflict in the country that I'm not directly involved in.

But in areas or in countries where you have a multiethnic society, we do have, in some of them, at least, we have a monitoring network in regions that are maybe particularly volatile, and they report to me on a monthly basis. We also share these reports with the governments as a kind of confidence-building measure, because I think sometimes, the problems with these governments is that they don't receive accurate information about what's going on in, particularly in interethnic relations.

We also, of course, follow open sources to a large degree, and we work closely with civil society and have reporting from them. We also work very closely with the 17 OSCE missions. You know, the OSCE has field missions in 17 countries. They report also to us. We work closely with them, so we have a number of sources.

But I think it's fair to admit that we are not entirely satisfied, and we see that we may need to--what should I say--fine tune it even more, and this has been one of the issues that we have been looking into during this trip to Washington and here in New York, [PH] Corporal Kandu who is here

today with one of my political advisors, has actually been tasked to work on this, and we are working with, or trying to pick the brains of different institutions and organizations that actually relate to this issue, because this is very important.

When it comes to Kyrgyzstan, we could have a different seminar, I think, but we try to follow this actively now, particularly in connection with the President's work on the concept of interethnic dialogue where we have seconded a couple of experts to the Presidential office, and we are participating in this process. We think that one of the fundamental problems there, the long-term problems--there are many short-term problems--but one of the fundamental long-term problems is a lack of, both of confidence between minorities and the ruling elite, so to say, the government, the Kyrgyz government, which is very ethnically pure, and also then channels of communication. There are no real channels, and this, we hope to be able to develop and implement through this concept. It's a long-term project, but we are working on it.

Rød-Larsen:

Thanks very much. Shep, you want to take the floor?

Shepard Forman:

Thank you, Terje. I'm Shep Forman, I'm at New York University and a member of the IPI board. I'm curious as to how you work in instances in which there is active military intervention. What is the nature of your relationship in those cases with NATO or other regional organizations that are responsible for a military response to ethnic conflict?

Vollebaek:

As I said, I have a very--as I see it--a very strong mandate, a kind of intrusive one. But there are certain caveats to all mandates, even to strong ones. One of them is that I have to work in confidence, so it means that I have, I'm not a name-and-shame institution, but another one is I'm not supposed to work during a conflict, and I think the whole idea was that one should only need this institution before a conflict, or to avoid a conflict, because there would not be a conflict.

Of course, in spite of the fact that my predecessors were great personalities, they did not manage to avoid all conflicts, as we all know, and it has then developed--even though I think it's kind of a stretching of the mandate--but it has absolutely developed a precedent, so to say, for us to work in postconflict situations. We work, for instance, quite actively in Kosovo, and the reason for this, you may say, is that a postconflict situation could as well be a preconflict situation.

But when the conflict erupts, when there is a war, like, for instance, in the short period where you had a war in Georgia between Russia and Georgia, I had nothing to do. I mean, we tried to do something before, and we are actively involved now afterwards, but in a war situation, my mandate specifically says that I am not entitled to intervene.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you once again. I'm seeing a couple of hands on the left hand side here, first at my extreme left here, and then I saw a hand here, a couple of hands down there.

Udo Janz:

Udo Janz from the UNHCR Office here in New York. Knut is, in my own country, known as an orphan ice bear by all and sundry. I'm glad to see the real Knut for a change here, and I wish you were as popular and as well known in Germany as you are among some better-informed people.

You laid it out very clearly, your work is carved out for you. You made reference to the rise in ethnonationalism that has crept in very forcefully, especially following the dissolution of the former USSR or the former Yugoslavia, and we have seen the complementarity, if you like, of the quiet diplomacy that you have to engage to address recommendations and advice to governments to prevent, often, what might follow otherwise. My own offices, as you can imagine, will pick up the pieces, if and when forced displacement results in either internally displaced, when refugees, when they cross the border, but it also is an issue which my office tries to address in the long term, and through concrete actions, of reducing, for example, statelessness issues.

You made a reference to your work on citizenship, advice to governments on how to avoid the pitfalls of people who have no right to have rights, and how often, therefore, not entitled to any forms of protection or assistance. I would regard the work that you do, albeit in a very limited geographic region, part of which obviously is the European Union, with its own instruments, its own norms and standards, including the European Convention on Human Rights, but I think you highlighted clearly the need to have such an institution as yours to address the many fault functions that are, perhaps, rearing their head in the wider region that you are responsible for, and perhaps something for the future we would all welcome to have on an even further enlarged area. I think the complementarity of your work is there to stay. I believe that we have plenty of results to show, and that is what counts, ultimately, and therefore, I would like to salute you and really congratulate you and wish you all the best for your future work. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much for salutations and comments. So we'll take a couple more questions and then come back to you, Knut. I see a hand over there.

Aziz Sevi:

Thank you. Aziz Sevi from the Turkish mission here. The issues that you mentioned, sir, they're very relevant, of course, for other regions as well, not to prevent conflict and disputes, particularly in Africa, so I would particularly refer to early warning mechanisms. In this regard, could you elaborate about your cooperation with other regional organizations in terms of, particularly, on training or education and experience sharing, best practice sharing? Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. There's also a gentleman just behind you there, I think, who wants to take the floor. There we go.

Stanislav Tolkach:

Good afternoon. Tolkach, from Russian mission. Thank you for your interesting presentation, Mr. High Commissioner. I have a question. How do you evaluate a situation with national minorities in Latvia and Estonia, in particular, the fact they consider as national minorities only citizens while there is a larger group of no citizens with so-called alien passport? Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. Knut, I think there are a few other hands, but I think we will give Knut the opportunity to respond to those questions.

Vollebaek:

Thank you. Thank you, first, Udo, it's kind of you, and I know that the polar bear Knut is very popular in Germany. I will never achieve that, I

think, but at the same time, I understood that he'd passed away the other day because of some, he had a brain disorder, and I at least hope I don't have a brain disorder, so even though I think some people think I do have, but I claim I don't.

And you referred, actually, to two issues that both the Turkish representative and the Russian one referred to. One was statelessness, and we're very happy to work now with the UNHCR on, particularly registration in the Balkans. We hope to do kind of a pilot project there, and again, then, specifically related to Roma in that respect, because we see that Roma is a big challenge for the whole of Europe, about 12 million, the largest minority in Europe, it has the problems with respect to this ethnic group and is absolutely not solved by any means. And there are many problems connected to it, but one of them is actually registration. That in many, many countries, they are not registered, and because of that, they fall outside of all kind of educational and welfare systems, and I'm very happy that UNHCR is kind of focusing on this in connection with the anniversary of the convention to combat statelessness, and we are working with them in that connection.

And this also, of course, the situation in Latvia and Estonia does not refer to the Roma, particularly, but we have, as the Russian representative will know, since the very inception of the institution, worked with the governments in those two countries to address the situation of statelessness, and I would say that they have come quite far. It has improved the situation quite considerably, but still, it's a problem. We have, about, I think in Estonia, about 8% of the population that are stateless, and in Latvia, it's about 13%, and of course, that's far too high. It's a human right to have citizenship, and it is something that we are continuing to work on. We have come forward with a number of, I think, quite practical means in order to speed up this process.

Also to kind of include those who still do not have citizenship, for instance, through participation in local election. Estonia does that, Latvia does that, and has been kind of practical ideas that we have come forward with, but we continue to work in both these countries and hope to be able to move this further to a solution that is satisfactory for all sides.

You had also referred to a kind of transferability that this institution could maybe take, not necessarily this institution, should take on for the region, but that the idea, the concept, the methodology could be used in other regions, and it, I suppose that was the same as the Turkish episode that they referred to. We don't have a formalized cooperation as HCNM with other organizations. As you will know, the OSCE has quite a bit of organizational cooperation, but in 2005, in this city, actually, there was the, my predecessor, Rolf Ekeus, organized a high-level seminar with secretary-generals of most regional organizations to look into the interest, possibility, of sharing the experiences from HCNM with these organizations, and maybe construct, build something similar.

I think it is... if we do a little reality check, I think it's very unlikely that you, today, will have such a strong mandate. For instance, my mandate is much stronger than UN rapporteurs. The UN rapporteur has to have... they have to be invited by the country that are going to report on them. I suppose that's one of the reasons why there aren't that many rapporteurs. And I don't need to be invited. I can call up and say, I

would like to come. Of course, there is--it's not entirely true, because I have to have somebody receiving me at the airport, and somebody talking to me in the offices, so we have to work off modalities--but most countries, actually, do accept my visits, and we have particularly been, as a follow-up to this conference that took place here in 2005, the Secretary-General of the OSCE had a conference on the more working level last December, and we have now said that we, often hopefully in cooperation somehow with the IPI, could do something targeting one specific organization. Maybe Africa could be a useful one where we will look at the possibility to show them the tools; the experiences that we have, and see if that could be of use in a regional organization and have that maybe as kind of a pilot project. It's not within my mandate. I can't really export my mandate or my institution to other institutions, but of course, I am free to share the experiences with anybody that would like to listen to me. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, once again. I think I saw a DPI hand over there.

Kiyo Akasaka: Thank you. I'm Kiyo Akasaka, head of the Department of Public Information of the United Nations. Thank you very much for this talk, which is very relevant to the work of the United Nations. We have been shocked in recent months about hearing the remarks of European politicians about multiculturalism having utterly failed, and my question is that where the approaches of the European countries will be going into more integrated approaches rather than multiculturalism, and for that, what factors will play most important role? Is that revision or language or cultural differences, the differences between minorities and majorities?

Rød-Larsen: I'd actually include that, exactly the same question, to the end of this meeting, but just to add a little bit, because I was rather stunned when I saw that both the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of France, and I also read an interview by a fellow Norwegian, the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe basically taking exactly the same position, saying that the quest for multiculturalism is dead, or has come to a dead end. Knut?

Vollebaek: I have to answer this. And to add to that, Mrs. Merkel said the same. And who am I, then, to say that they're wrong? But I will say that they're wrong.

Rød-Larsen: Hey, you've got your headlines for tomorrow!

Vollebaek: No, I think, I think they are wrong in two ways. First of all, it's not a choice. I mean, there is no monoethnic state left. I don't know if there's anyone from Lichtenstein here, but I think even today Lichtenstein is multicultural and multiethnic. Iceland is, at least, they were for a very long time not, but they have opened up, so there is no monoethnic, monocultural country left. So let's state that first.

And then the question is, what do we do then? Do we state that it has failed, or do we say that we have to do something to make it work? If we say that it has failed and sit back, what are the consequences? Because the consequences are that we don't address the issues that we have to address. And as you may recall, I quoted Amartya Sen, who talks about the difference between a multi-monoculturalism and multiculturalism, and I think, of course there are problems in Norway, in Germany, in France,

in Britain when we look at integration, when we look at society with different ethnic groups and cultures and languages and backgrounds, no doubt. But what has failed, then, is actually an integration with respect for diversity, if we should use a kind of slogan, but this is actually more than a slogan. It should be a reality, because we have to make sure that we have an integrated society, but integration doesn't mean assimilation.

I have visited several countries that have been, groups have been subject to forced assimilation, and I can assure it doesn't work. I haven't found one place that forced assimilation worked. I think voluntary, voluntary assimilation can very well work. Like, for instance, this country. A lot of people come to the United States and dream to become Americans. I can assure you, I don't know anyone that would go to Norway and dream to become a Norwegian. They would come to Norway because they want to work, they want to earn money, they want to get higher salaries, they want to live a good life, but not to become a Norwegian. America is quite unique in that context.

So most other countries, we have to accept that people keep their identity, they keep their background, their history, but at the same time, they are living in the majority society, and there, of course, comes my mandate in, to a certain degree, extent, handy, because I'm not a human rights institution. I don't find some kind of funny little minority and keep, take them up and dangle them in front of the rest and say, please be nice to these people. I tell also the minorities that they have to integrate. They have to accept to learn the state language. There are countries where you have one state language, and they have to learn it in order to be integrated into society, but what we also then tell the government is, of course, is that they have to provide possibilities for this, because that's often not the case.

So this is... that's why I also talk about integration of societies more than integration into societies, because this has to be a take and give on both sides. It's extremely demanding, but it will be much more demanding if we just say that multiculturalism has failed without addressing these issues today, because the issues in Europe are scary, the situation, as you referred to, Mrs. Merkel, something and the others, but you have politicians that go much, much further in the xenophobic rhetoric, nationalistic attitude in today's Europe, which I think is something that we have to address as soon as possible if we at all shall be able to handle it without a major conflict.

Rød-Larsen: After this broadside, maybe representatives of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany would like to take the floor? Or maybe they are not here!

Vollebaek: Don't tell them!

Rød-Larsen: I think you silenced them! Anybody else who wants to take the floor at this stage? Abdullah?

Abdullah Alsaidi: First, I think, I want to commend you for progressive views on this question. I think you are absolutely right that integration to societies, not the minorities integrate, it's society that should integrate. I often think that part of the problem, whether it's in Germany or others, they think integration is a decision. Just go ahead, integrate, and that's over. But it

is not. It's a process, not a decision. You know the psychological agony and the cultural heritage and the background. It is not an arbitrary decision to say, well, now, or to use the Cartesian method and just doubt everything and come back to this side. I don't think it is like this. That is why I think you are doing, your strategy is the correct one.

My question is, in the integration, and I agree with you that, how do you save the culture of those who are going to integrate? Are we going to have, I believe that you believe that we will have a better synthesis when you integrate in a way, but I really took the floor to commend you for your views of this subject.

Rød-Larsen:

Maybe I should say before I give you the floor, Knut, that the speaker is representing the International Peace Institute, and he's also a former Ambassador of Yemen, and we're very proud to have him with us. Knut.

Vollebaek:

Thank you, Ambassador. No, I am... thank you for your nice words, but it is challenging, and I think one also has to address these issues to a certain degree ad hoc. It has to be, you have to look at the specific situation in a country, or in a society. I don't think it's one size fits all, because it has to do with, it has to do with history, it has to do with the reasons why the society is multicultural and multiethnic, and it has to do, of courses, also with the size of these groups. It is, of course, the difference.

If you allow me a little, kind of, sweet story. When I travel to these countries, I always meet with all the different ethnic groups, and they have systems of representativity, and I was in one country where I had an interpreter. My Russian is, unfortunately, nonexistent, and I had an interpreter that had a little problem with interpretation, and the figures went a little bit wrong, and then there was one gentleman, a little gentleman that told me that he wanted schools and he wanted kindergartens, and he wanted houses and all this for his ethnic group, and I said, how many are you? And he said, 70, and I thought the interpreter made a mistake, so I said, you are 70,000? And he said, no, no, no, we are 70 people.

And of course, if you have a group of 70, seven-zero people, it's a limit to what you can require from a government, but in most cases, you have large groups, and then, of course, there are certain issues that you have to raise. I think we have to uphold the right to mother-tongue education. I think that's very important in order to keep your identity, it has a lot to do with your identity, and this is a problem in some countries. It's a problem for political reasons, but it could also, of course, be a practical problem, because in many of the countries I work, as you will appreciate, the education system per se is not very well running, so it's not only that you have a problem for the minorities, but you have also problem for the majority.

So we have to work on the education system, I think, to improve that as a basic opportunity and a basic tool for integration, meaning that both finding modalities of keeping, keeping the identity, mother-tongue culture, but at the same time then learning the state language, and I think also the field of job employment is a very important area that you, it may not have so much to do with keeping your identity, but it has to do with a respect with acceptance that you are not excluded from positions and

work. If you are excluded from taking up positions in public service, and positions in law enforcement agencies, it creates a situation of alienation, a situation of frustration that I think is very dangerous, so I think through education and through employment, we have to balance then, integration, and to repeat myself, with respect for diversity.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you. Any further questions or comments? Please, go ahead.

Basma Alkhayer:

Thank you for a very enlightening meeting. My name is Basma Alkhayer and I'm with the U.S. Federation for Middle East Peace. Case in point, you were talking about integration. It's Sweden. I happen to be in Sweden a few times, and we have established an office there, and I was really struck by the Swedish government and their system for their immigrants. They do teach them, and they teach their children their own language, meaning their mother-tongue language, and even though the children, they're born there, and of course, also, they have to learn the Swedish language to assimilate in the society, but there was something that was kind of unique for me to see, that they have combined both, and they gave them their respect of their heritage still and their mother tongue, and then, of course, of the country that they are in. And I thought that was a good example. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. Sebastian.

Sebastian von Einsiedel:

Sebastian Einsiedel from the UN Department of Political Affairs. I was intrigued by something you said at the very outset of your presentation, which was, if I understood you correctly, that if your mandate was renegotiated today, the more intrusive elements of it would fall under the bus. Now, a two-part question in this respect. Number one, it seems to challenge the conventional wisdom that the past 20 years have been a progressive erosion of absolute notions of sovereignty. Now, is the reason that you wouldn't get this intrusive mandate today just because your mandate was negotiated in immediate post-Cold War euphoria, or has it indeed progressively become more difficult for you to work? And second question in this respect, I wonder whether you could elaborate a little more on the politics of your work with respect to sovereignty concerns, what do you do if you try to engage countries who are very reluctant to engage you?

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. That was a very broad question and just a little bit of time...

Vollebaek:

No, I'll try to be, I'll try to be brief. No, I think, I think... it's true that one would not have a mandate like this today, and I think it is partly because of the post-Cold War euphoria. If you look at some of the OSCE documents from 1990, 1991, it's of course, it's a new area, we... there is multilateralism is the new tool for creating peace and future common activities in the world, and secondly, it was that European politicians were panic struck by the war in the Balkans. I mean, we didn't expect that, I think it's fair to say, and when they saw this happening, by, in a way that were totally unexpected, because it was a new way of war, it was interethnic tension in one country that spilled over into another country, became regional conflict, became, yeah, a major, major conflict for the whole of Europe with dire consequences.

And they had no tools. They didn't know how to attack it, and I think because, if you read, there are some doctoral theses on the negotiations, the creation of the mandate, that it wasn't easy, the preposition "on" and "for" was elaborated even more than you do commas in the UN, so it was really very difficult, and because it should not be "for," it should not be promotion, promoting national minorities, but it should be both sides. So it was very difficult, but I think there was a determination and the fear that we don't know how to handle this, and we have to find ways of doing it, and let us do the most we can. So I think that's more the fact that it has become more difficult.

I would say if you go back to the 1990s, the situation is better in many ways now, but I would not agree with you that the--what should I say--the notion of nation-state and the notion of national borders and the fear of internal interference has gone away from our region. While we see some responsibility to protect action now in North Africa, but I think this is, I think, still, governments care very much for what's happening internally in their countries, and it's not an open society yet.

So I think we, the OSCE region, of course, we, as we may know, the OSCE works on the basis of consensus, and what is, when it works, the beauty of it is that you can refer to countries and say that this is your own decision. It's nothing that has been imposed on you.

And that way, I also can say, with respect to this mandate, that this is, this is your mandate, this is your instrument, and when countries will not work with me, there is, according to the... when the crisis is dire, there is, within my mandate, there is what they call the early warning mechanism, which is kind of an ultimate level. It has been used only twice. It was used in 1999 by the then-High Commissioner Max van der Stoep on the situation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I was, at that time, myself, chairman in office of the OCSE, and I used it last year in connection with Kyrgyzstan, and that brings then, there are certain mechanisms, it requires that the Permanent Council meets, it requires that action is taken, so it is my kind of last tool, so to say, if there is no working relationship, or where... well, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, it wasn't that there was no working relationship. The government was kind of forthcoming, but the situation was such that I was not able to handle it in any kind of communication with the government, and I wanted more attention to it.

Rød-Larsen:

May I invite, for the last one or two questions. Then if there are no more questions or request for interventions, it is left to me as to thank you, Knut, I would say for your clarity and your frankness. I think I'm not exaggerating when I say that you have enlightened us on, and invigorated the debates on these very important issues, and I think it's also fair to say that I think you have impacted on our attitudes on the issues, and I think you have convinced us of the utmost importance of the job you are doing, and also on the importance of the message which you are carrying. At the end of your opening remarks, you wished us good luck. I think there are much more reasons for us to wish you good luck in your important job. Thank you very much, Knut.