



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

**MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATION  
THROUGH INTER-STATE DIALOGUE**

address by  
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to the International Conference

**“The Challenge of Educational Reform  
in Multi-Ethnic Central Asia”**

[Check Against Delivery]

Tashkent, Uzbekistan – 28 November 2006

*The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.' (Diogenes)*

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, Messrs. Ministers, Distinguished Participants,

It is an honour for me to be able to address you today on the challenge of educational reform in multi-ethnic Central Asia. I would like to express my gratitude to the Minister of Public Education of Uzbekistan for co-organizing this Conference. The nations of Central Asia have traditionally placed a high value on education. This thirst for knowledge and the pursuit of discovery have attracted some of the world's greatest scholars to the region: their contribution to the natural and social sciences, philosophy and literature continues to have a lasting impact on our lives today. This academic excellence and achievement were, to a large degree, made possible by a willingness to embrace all learning and the centuries-long links in the region which promoted the free flow of ideas and human capital. Bearing in mind these historic bonds, I feel it is especially appropriate that we should be discussing how to revitalize this positive heritage and help each other address some of the challenges of educational modernization in our multi-ethnic societies.

The States of Central Asia are not alone in facing this challenge. They follow the world trend in which education reform has emerged as the leading political issue in both developed and developing countries. It is now internationally recognized that high-quality education is a precondition for both self-sustained domestic development and international competitiveness.

According to World Bank reports a crucial factor in the economic success of East Asia from the 1970s to 1990s was investment in “human capital”, especially through well-targeted investments in education. These countries, in particular China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, went a further step, and in addition to investment in human capital realized the importance of mutual co-operation in education. In their “Joint Declaration on the Promotion of Tripartite Cooperation” of October 2003, they expressed their commitment to “enhance cooperation to expand student exchanges among their institutions of higher education, promote mutual institutions’ recognition of academic records, degrees and credits, and encourage language teaching and cultural exchange among the three countries.”

Similarly, the States of Central Asia have been considering the idea of tackling some of the most pressing educational issues in a collective way. In 2002, a forum was established in Almaty as a unique regional co-operative initiative, providing a common platform for addressing issues in education concerning the five countries of Central Asia.

Two years ago here in Tashkent, a Central Asia Ministerial Conference, organized under the auspices of the then Bulgarian Chairmanship of the OSCE, was held entitled "Education as an Investment into the Future". During this Conference, Central Asian governments highlighted the problem of limited financial resources as one of the main challenges, which means that difficult choices have to be made when prioritizing investments. At the same time, governments took note that investment in education has been shown to be a major factor in promoting social stability. As the Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen observed, advances in areas of education have a critical role in promoting development, and thereby, security.<sup>1</sup>

These initiatives have paved the way for greater awareness among the international community about the need to assist the republics of Central Asia in their joint effort to reform their education systems.

We, at the OSCE, are well aware of the importance of stability and the challenge faced by the Central Asian countries. Indeed, OSCE participating States adopted a policy of comprehensive security which aims at linking national and international security through co-operation on the basis of a common normative framework. As regards minorities, the OSCE sees the protection of minorities as a key element in the wider framework of comprehensive security grounded in, *inter alia*, democratic governance, including respect for human rights under the rule of law.

I therefore see the dialogue between the States of Central Asian on minority education issues not only as an expression of their common historic, demographic, social, economic, political and cultural heritage but also as a positive contribution to the issue of comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Amartya Sen: *The Importance of Basic Education*. Address to the Commonwealth Education Conference, (Edinburgh) 27 October 2003.

security.

As the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities I have a particular perspective on the issue of education, including the education rights of national minorities. As many of you know, the mandate of the High Commissioner is one of conflict prevention in the area of inter-ethnic relations. In order to be effective I have to concentrate on and offer my support to the long-term prospects of inter-ethnic harmony.

Personal experience has shown me that one of the keys to achieving stability and prosperity is to ensure that education promotes the integration of different ethnic communities. In my view, integration respecting diversity is an important way of reducing tensions and therefore the risk of future conflict. Such integration of minorities avoids the extremes of forced assimilation, on the one hand, and separatism, on the other.

Integration policies have to respect human rights – including the rights of minorities to maintain their own language, culture and traditions. Access to minority-language education can be crucial for persons belonging to national minorities in its implications for cultural continuity (as well as in terms of easing the educational experience for the child). At the same time access to State-language education is also important when it comes to preparing individuals in taking advantage of employment and other opportunities within society as a whole. Indeed, it is my experience that as a result of teaching both minority and State language, language can become a medium for communication rather than a basis for exclusion.

The most practical source of guidance for my work in the education field is *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Educational Rights of National Minorities*, elaborated by a group of internationally recognized experts ten years ago.

In a number of countries in which I am involved, I have drawn on the essence of these Recommendations to emphasize that the right of persons belonging to national minorities to maintain their identity can only be fully realized if they acquire a proper knowledge of their mother tongue during the educational process. At the same time, I stress that persons

belonging to national minorities have a responsibility to integrate into the wider national society through the acquisition of a proper knowledge of the State language. I have often recalled that according to The Hague Recommendations, “the attainment of multilingualism by the national minorities of OSCE States can be seen as a most effective way of meeting the objective of international instruments...”

I have also recommended to a number of States that the introduction of educational reforms in order that national minorities attain bilingual/multilingual skills, should be undertaken with careful consideration of the impact that such reform can have on children and on communities. In many transitional democracies, where a substantial part of the population may not speak the designated State language to any degree of proficiency, there is a need for adequate educational opportunities for persons belonging to minorities to improve their command of the State language(s).

In developing an education system there are many issues which can be usefully discussed with others facing similar problems, with a view to exchanging experiences and developing mutual cooperation. The most important issue that relates both to the quality of education and to the intercultural and multilingual aspects of education is the content of the curriculum. The Hague Recommendations spells out the details of this obligation by urging “[s]tate educational authorities [to] ensure that the general compulsory curriculum includes the teaching of the histories, cultures and traditions of their respective national minorities.”

Two other key requirements for the effective education of minorities are teachers trained to teach in the minority language and textbooks in their language. Normally, it would be impossible to organize education in the minority language at primary- and secondary-school levels without sufficient teachers who are trained in the mother tongue, and The Hague Recommendations recognizes this. An adequate supply of up to date textbooks is indispensable. Other issues of common interest include modern methods of language teaching and the use of open and distance learning techniques.

It is however important to recognize that States, including those represented here, may have possible financial, administrative and technical difficulties associated with minority language

education. For many States, this is one of the toughest challenges in the successful reform. These difficulties, as the Hague Recommendations argue, should not prevent the States from ensuring minority language education rights to the maximum of their available resources, individually and through international assistance and co-operation. It is therefore important to recognize that the Central Asian countries may have financial constraints that inhibit successful education reform. However, in view of the shared history and overlap of languages and cultures in the region, cooperation between Central Asia and neighbouring states can make an important contribution to reducing the costs of minority education as well as contributing to the process of educational reform through the sharing of experiences.

Therefore we should discuss at this Conference to what extent there are possibilities for co-operation in the field of education, including minority education as well as for international assistance. In this respect, I would like to warmly welcome representatives of the donor organizations taking part in our discussion.

International financial assistance will however be greatly assisted if the States of the region were to combine their efforts in taking on the challenge and discussing the form and the scope of inter-State co-operation in the field of minority education. It is important to consider to what extent formalized co-operation would be beneficial to both promoting good neighbourly relations and decreasing the costs of education reform

As the High Commissioner on National Minorities, I often see the interest of States in well-being of the communities in other States with whom they share an ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity or common cultural heritage. This is natural and legitimate. In this context, I would like to stress that the primary responsibility for the well being of these communities lies on the State of their residence. Indeed, the State of residence is obliged to protect rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including their education rights.

At the same time, the State of residence should be receptive to any assistance offered to these communities by the neighbouring States in the field of education and culture. From the point of view of good neighbourly relations and conflict prevention, the most effective way of

ensuring that such assistance is helpful rather than damaging is to insist that it be based on specific agreements between the countries concerned. Such assistance, in particular with regard to teacher training, development of curricula and textbooks, recognition of qualifications and mobility of teachers and students would significantly reduce cost related difficulties associated with to education reforms.

I therefore welcome a regular institutionalized inter-State dialogue on minority education issues. Future co-operation in this area can, I believe, help to develop practical measures to strengthen and carry forward the modernization process of education in Central Asia countries and to foster the sort of co-operation across the region that will further promote social integration within Central Asia's multi-ethnic nations. Ultimately, it will serve as a precondition for the prosperous development of the region and its individual countries.

Thank you for your attention!