



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

**TWENTY YEARS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF  
THE PEOPLE OF KAZAKHSTAN:  
CELEBRATION, REFLECTION AND LOOKING FORWARD**

address by  
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to the  
**International parliamentary conference in honour of the  
20th anniversary of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan**

**[Check against delivery]**

Astana, Kazakhstan – 16 June 2015

Mr. Speaker,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Members of Parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address this prestigious gathering on the special occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. I was in Kazakhstan one year ago, and it is a pleasure to be here in Astana again. There are many reasons why I welcome the opportunity to spend more time in this beautiful and fascinating country. But I would like to tell you three particular reasons why I am pleased to be participating in this event with you today.

The first reason is that we gather here to celebrate the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and its 20th anniversary. My warmest congratulations to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as the Chairman of the Assembly, to all the members of the Assembly and indeed to all of Kazakhstan for this achievement. In these two decades, the Assembly has established a reputation as a unique model for the representation of different groups in Kazakhstani society. The support the Assembly receives from the highest levels reflects the value placed on inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan.

Because we share the goals of embracing diversity, of maintaining peace and promoting dialogue, the Assembly has long been an important partner of my Institution in Kazakhstan. Indeed, the first OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, took a special interest in the Assembly when he made his second visit to Kazakhstan in 1995, when the Assembly was newly established. He even recommended to other countries that they consider establishing similar bodies. Active co-operation with the Assembly continued under successive High Commissioners, and I consider it a priority to continue this fruitful relationship.

The second reason I am especially pleased to be here today is because this event gathers parliamentarians from different countries. I feel rather at home in such company because, as you may know, I served in my own country's parliament for almost ten years, and in the European Parliament – the latter being a true multinational parliament.

I am sure you will agree that the work of members of parliament can be extremely challenging, but it is also rewarding to represent one's constituents and to engage in the legislative process. Since I have taken up my position as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, I have gained additional appreciation for the important role of lawmakers in the protection and promotion of diversity in societies across the OSCE region. Legislation should reflect this diversity, incorporate the principles of non-discrimination and effective equality, and create an environment that facilitates the integration of society.

Legislatures themselves should also reflect the diversity of societies. Unfortunately, in the OSCE region we continue to see cases when persons belonging to national minorities face structural and practical obstacles to achieving representation in parliament.

In the work of my Institution, laws on issues such as minority rights, education, languages, public administration, media and elections can be particularly relevant in addressing the situation of national minorities and in promoting a balanced approach to the rights and interests of both majorities and minorities. Parliamentarians have much power in their hands when they hold the drafting pen on a new law or raise their hands in a debate. They have the responsibility to ensure that laws are fair and just for all members of society, no matter their race, religion, ethnicity or mother tongue.

Of course, a law that meets all these criteria on paper will achieve little without adequate mechanisms for implementation. This is one of the central elements of rule of law.

I mentioned that I have three reasons why I am especially glad to participate in today's event. The third reason is that a 20th anniversary is an opportunity for celebration but also for reflection. The last 20 years have seen many changes not only in Kazakhstan, but throughout the OSCE region. This gives us much to reflect upon.

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities celebrated its 20th anniversary two years ago, a few months before I took up the position. Twenty-year-olds are not teenagers any longer. They have learned some lessons about life. In the case of my Institution, we have learned lessons about some of the ways that societies can manage diversity and ensure stability. The situation in the world today demonstrates that these are very real challenges. True stability is best based on real integration of all different groups in society, which

requires full respect for minority rights, mutual accommodation, and striking a delicate balance between the interests of all in a shared society.

There is no magic solution. But we have found that societies where minority rights are respected, where all members of society have equal opportunities to participate in economic, social, cultural and political life, and where integration is taken seriously as a policy priority have lower risk of tensions and conflicts involving majority and minority communities. When I speak of integration, I refer to the integration of society as a whole, not the integration of minorities into society.

Nor is integration an end in itself. No society is fully integrated; rather integration is a continuous, dynamic process that requires constant adjustment. This process of integration, and the making of laws and policies to facilitate it, should involve all members of society. Citizens should be genuinely involved and included, not only at a token or symbolic level. Here, parliaments and bodies such as the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan play a critical role in making sure that the voices of people from different groups in society are heard and represented when decisions are made.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At anniversaries, we celebrate, we reflect and we gather energy for the next steps. Twenty years is a great milestone, but a 20-year-old still has a long life ahead. I wish the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, and all of you in this room today, much success in your future work.

Thank you.