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Ressort: Politik

Language Policy and Conflict Prevention conference: Oslo

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Global migration, digitalization and the role of women present modern challenges and opportunities to effective and balanced language policies, agreed participants at the close of a high-level conference on language policy and conflict prevention held on 31st May in Oslo. The Conference commemorated the 20th anniversary of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities' (HCNM) Oslo Recommendations.

Reviewing the situation of developments during the past 20 years since the launch of the Oslo Recommendations, former HCNM and former Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek said that the Recommendations, as “soft law”, aided to improve diversity management in Europe and that national legislation on minority rights has been adopted in many of European states.

Language policy can promote stability. For many individuals and groups, language is a key factor of identity, and threats to it can raise tensions. Respect for linguistic rights, at the same time as considering a state’s need to maintain cohesion, lessens conflict potential.

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities promotes functional solutions to such contentious issues, and the Oslo Recommendations concerning the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities tackle these challenges. The components of a balanced legal and policy framework on language use have a view to preventing conflict.

“To respond to these new challenges is essential for effective conflict prevention,” highlighted the OSCE High Commissioner Lamberto Zannier, while noting that he observes a “renewed urgency” for States to engage in the issues of language policy and linguistic rights.

Zannier thanked “the many high-level representatives of the OSCE participating States for contributing to the debate by sharing national best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of language-related policies.”

Referring to the current challenge presented by migration, Audun Halvorsen, Norway's State Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs alluded to “breaches of fundamental freedoms, discrimination against minorities, diminishing respect for the rule of law, increasing nationalism and populism – all of which can lead to conflict. We are living in challenging times, and the need for tools to prevent conflict is great.”

UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes talked about the increasing co-operation

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between his office and the HCNM, the Council of Europe and other actors, and recommended a “united front with other international actors and the use of joint letters, statements and specialized high-level conferences to address modern language rights challenges.” Ambassador of Italy to Norway and Representative of the Italian 2018 OSCE Chairmanship Alberto Colella reiterated that national minority issues feature high on the agenda of the Italian OSCE Chairmanship.

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