

**OSCE tolerance implementation meeting on promoting inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding**  
Almaty, 12-13 June 2006

Session III: *National, regional and international initiatives to promote inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and civil society*

**Statement by Ambassador Rytis Paulauskas,  
Head of Permanent Mission of the Republic of Lithuania  
to the International Organizations**

Mr. Chairman,

At the very outset, I would like to thank our Kazakh hosts for holding this meeting, for their hospitality and to express appreciation to organizers for interesting discussions we already had. I would like to add my thanks to this session's speakers for their thought-provoking presentations.

OSCE is establishing high standards and developing wide norms in all aspects of human rights. Tolerance, non discrimination and respect for others are basis for every democratic society. Therefore we see the OSCE as a proper forum, where we can openly discuss the issues of tolerance in national, regional and international perspective.

Lithuania gives a great attention to OSCE commitments in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination. We are supporting the initiative of Chairmanship to devote all our efforts this year for the implementation of relevant OSCE decisions and to continue our work in the spirit of Vienna, Berlin, Brussels and Cordoba Conferences.

Regional initiatives are a valuable tool in exchanging experiences and best practices in building more tolerant societies. It allows finding ways forward that are more reflecting regional situations and activities are devised giving attention to the specific situation in the region – both common historical background and present tendencies.

Lithuania pays a very significant role for activities on the regional level. Promotion of tolerance and mutual respect in the countries in transition from totalitarian regime to democracy is one of the fundamental tasks of national governments and civil society in these countries. Seeking to promote OSCE activities and to strengthen regional cooperation Lithuania in April hosted a round-table entitled **“Relations among peoples: tolerance towards active respect – continuing the spirit of OSCE conferences”**. This was an opportunity for representatives from Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, as well as from international organizations – including the OSCE – to exchange their ideas and experiences in building more tolerant society. We are grateful to Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating anti-Semitism prof. G. Weisskirchen for his attendance in the round-table and for his valuable contributions.

Round-table discussions were focused on three main issues: challenges of radical ideologies (intolerance, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism), analysis of instances of intolerance and multiethnic relations, and response to the situations that would leave from prejudices and suspicions

to tolerance and respect. The presentations and discussions were summarised in conclusions which focus mainly on the ways how to promote tolerance in future. However, some general remarks regarding intolerance were made, i.e. influence of historic heritage to the level of tolerance was emphasized and it was underlined that hierarchy of forms of intolerance cannot be established.

One of the general ideas that emerged during discussions was that the forms of intolerance may be specific, but the means in fighting them remain essentially the same and include data gathering, work on developing legislation, implementation of legal provisions, education, role of the media and encouragement for dialogue.

The round-table participants stressed the need to pay more attention to education. It was underlined that emphasis of these activities should be put on spreading the culture of tolerance. Lithuania highlights the importance of education, as one of the conditions to promote tolerance. As a positive example I would like to mention the creation of tolerance education centers in Lithuania. 43 centers had been already opened around Lithuania. Aims of these centers are to develop and cherish culture of human rights, professionally and effectively organize education about totalitarian regimes, immortalize memory of victims of the occupation regimes.

Another example of national activities in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination is new National Anti-discrimination programme which is being prepared in Lithuania. Programme will focus on all forms of discrimination and will provide measures for diminishing this phenomenon. The envisaged activities are directed at enhancing legal instruments, carrying out surveys and studies, organizing public educational campaigns and educational activities. Outcomes which we expect will include not only enhanced legal regulations and better analysis of the situation, but also better awareness of the society about life of different groups of the society and their problems, improvement of tolerance towards different members of the society and eradicating some stereotypes.

National Anti-discrimination programme will deal with different types of discrimination – age, gender, racial and national origin and others. It should be stressed that such comprehensive approach sends a very powerful message that discrimination as such is impermissible and must be tackled comprehensively as one phenomenon that endangers life of the society.

Lithuania could be identified as the country of national, cultural and confessional diversity. For centuries representatives of different nationalities as well as representatives of ten different traditional confessions peacefully lived together in Lithuania. We have a long lasting history of valuable inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations, but modern world brings new challenges. Therefore we all together have to find new attractive forms and develop new methods to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, let me express our belief that OSCE could play an important role as regional and international forum for discussions on the most important topics and finding solutions of the most difficult problems. We should use OSCE/ODIHR experience and knowledge in searching the way forward but we should act more actively ourselves on national, regional and international level.

Thank you.