



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Session 3: Combating Intolerance and Discrimination II**

As prepared for delivery by Gregg Rickman  
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
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Moderator,

Historical figures such as Adolf Hitler have demonstrated the ramifications of political discourse that promotes prejudice and hatred. The United States therefore views the focus of this session on the role of political leaders in combating intolerance as very timely. In recent years politicians and political parties tolerating -- if not actually promoting -- incitement and hatred under the guises of bolstering national identity or securing their country from terrorists within the OSCE has become more commonplace. While no country or society is free from racism, religious bigotry, or xenophobia, including the United States, the tools that States have at their disposal to deal with these problems are often circumscribed in free societies that value and legally protect free speech and assembly. However, the answer is not criminalization, but rather rigorous debate, education and public examination of how political parties benefit by manipulating feelings of hate even in the absence of a credible political platform. We are pleased and honored to have the opportunity to participate in this dialogue.

As an example of the common problems we all face, we recognize that groups promoting intolerance can from time to time be elected to office under democratic processes in any country, including in the United States, as our own history shows. We are nevertheless concerned by the policies and rhetoric of the "Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty" (ITS) grouping within the European Parliament. Comprised of far-right parties from seven EU member states, its members have openly denied the Holocaust, made offensive and ill-informed remarks about Roma, and advocated for the expulsions of Muslims, Africans, and other racial and religious minorities from their countries without regard to citizenship.

We view these as worrying signs that some individuals in countries within the OSCE region are becoming less tolerant and respectful of their diverse citizenry. As a stark contrast to this unfortunate example, we note the establishment of the European Fundamental Rights Agency in March 2007, which can help promote responsibility and tolerance among political parties on issues related to race, ethnic and national origin, and religion.

We are also greatly disappointed by the recent manifestations of bigotry emanating from leading political figures in several participating States. For example, during a parliamentary confirmation hearing in April, an Ambassadorial nominee in Romania was subjected to degrading questions regarding his Jewish heritage by some members of the Romanian Senate –

with no public condemnation from their peers. Political leaders bear a unique responsibility to promote solidarity, tolerance and respect amongst their country's citizenry, not to sow mistrust and discord. We should bear in mind that the best antidote to hate speech is more speech. In the case of the Romanian Senate members, for example, that hateful speech could have been publicly criticized by other members of the Romanian Senate to set an example that racial or religious hatred or bigotry, regardless of its victim, should not be acceptable as a matter of morality and public policy. In this regard, we welcome an example from Hungary in which parliamentarian Imre Mecs in April gave a speech condemning the resurgent use of symbols and insignias associated with the Holocaust in his country.

Acknowledging the difficulties of combating intolerance, and the necessity of preserving our commitment to and respect for freedom of expression, some recent political efforts are promising. We note in Romania following several high profile incidents of bigotry against Roma, the appointment of a Roma Advisor to the President and the hosting of the Bucharest Conference on Combating Discrimination. In Poland, we applaud the Czestochowa mayor's denouncement of the desecration of hundreds of Jewish graves in August and his personal participation in the clean up effort. We also welcome the Polish Government's support for the construction of a Museum of the History of Polish Jews and expect this project will help foster greater understanding and tolerance in Poland. We believe that public statements by the Ukrainian Prime Minister and President denouncing acts of intolerance and that continued efforts to address the role of the Interregional Academy of Personnel, also known as MAUP, in fostering anti-Semitism, are constructive. The recent increase in violent attacks in Ukraine targeting persons with non-Slavic appearances or darker skin is, however, disturbing and should be promptly addressed, in part by the Government's acknowledgement of the problem and the immediate collecting and reporting of hate crimes statistics.

We applaud statements by President Putin condemning acts of intolerance and Russia's invitation to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. The United States has also invited this Rapporteur to visit our country and hope other participating States will similarly welcome visits of this Special Rapporteur to their countries. At the same time, we urge Russia to work more aggressively to address the alarming rate of violent attacks directed towards its indigenous minorities and temporary residents -- especially persons with non-Slavic appearances or darker skin. We are concerned that Russia's new law on extremism is vague, subject to political abuse, and therefore will not effectively serve as a constructive tool to achieve its stated goal. We urge Russia to revisit this law, taking into account the concerns raised, including those of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We note with concern anti-Semitic statements by public officials, such as Duma Deputy Nikolay Kondratenko, who most recently on September 5 called those who condemn the Stalinist purges "Zionists."

The United States is especially heartened by recent efforts to promote inclusion and diversity in several participating States. The United Kingdom's year-long campaign to commemorate the anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and address slavery's ongoing impact on afro-descendants are to be praised. Also of note are efforts within France, Germany and other countries in the European Union to encourage the political participation of Muslims, African descendants and other minorities at ministerial, parliamentary, and other levels of government.

The support of Cologne's mayor and City Council in Germany for building a mosque with the traditional minaret is another positive development, especially when contrasted with violent attacks on minorities in other parts of Germany.

Finally, in keeping with the theme of this session, we note the role of several members of the United States Congress in combating intolerance. This year's delegation to the OSCE parliamentary assembly introduced a resolution urging OSCE participating States to implement tolerance commitments and inviting the Personal Representatives to speak about their work. The United States supports the continuation of inter-parliamentarian efforts to combat intolerance, including opportunities for parliamentarians to share techniques they have used in their own countries.