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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
(including human rights youth education on TND)**

Tirana, 21 May 2013

Speaking Points – Sessions 2-3-4

- Part 1. Comprehensive approach to combating intolerance and discrimination
2: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions
3: Combating anti-Semitism
4: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims
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1. As a universal human right, freedom of religion or belief is a priority under the EU's human rights policy. The EU defends and promotes the principled position that freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental right to which everyone is entitled. It includes the right to choose a religion of one's own choice, the right to change one's religion, and the right to live without religious conviction or activity – as well as the right to publicly manifest this choice.
2. In accordance with the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy of 25 June 2012 the EU is currently finalizing its Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) building upon existing instruments and documents, recalling key principles and containing clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of FoRB worldwide.
3. The EU and its Member States are committed to combating intolerance, discrimination, stigmatisation and incitement to hatred and xenophobia based on religion or belief in a determined and concrete manner, as we see such intolerance as a threat to FoRB. We will continue to do so while fully upholding freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms. The specific EU legislation in place obliging EU Member States to penalize any public incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, and to hold perpetrators to account under criminal law, contributes to that. We recognise that inter-faith dialogues promote mutual respect and understanding and inclusiveness across our societies - an important challenge that requires perseverance and the involvement of civil society.
4. At the multilateral level, notably the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council, we need to consolidate the consensus reached at the UN on the need to protect freedom of religion or belief, to fight religious intolerance and to

address problems in concrete terms, while avoiding concepts like that of the "defamation of religions".

5. Our aim should be to protect the right of all persons to freely observe, without persecution or discrimination, the religion of their choosing or lack thereof, as opposed to protecting religions as such, to the detriment of other core human rights, such as freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is necessary to create pluralistic, tolerant, broad-minded and democratic societies.
6. While remaining fully committed to the robust protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief, we would like also to underline that religion may never be used to justify or condone the restriction or violation of human rights, including the rights of women.
7. The persecution of individuals and religious communities of groups of all faiths anywhere in the world is of profound concern to us. We are concerned about rising anti-Christian intolerance and violence, as well as vandalism of religious monuments and symbols in the OSCE area and beyond, a trend which often remains unnoticed. We are equally concerned about the continuing, and often violent, manifestations of anti-Semitism, a disturbingly persistent phenomenon despite attempts to uproot it also through human rights education. Likewise, we are concerned that the difficulties in coping with the increasing diversity in many societies has thwarted efforts towards combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.