



EUROPEAN UNION

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 4 October 2011

EU Statement – Session 12: Tolerance and non - discrimination I

Ms/Mr Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The European Union reiterates its commitment to safeguard the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and prevent aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism and xenophobia. The EU also stands firmly against all sorts of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age or gender identity. We support actions aimed at fostering protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as at combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia in the OSCE area. Our common efforts in this respect should be further consolidated and strengthened.

In times of the world economic turmoil, which does not spare the OSCE area and can stimulate the rise of nationalistic and xenophobic incidents, the participating States should pay special attention to the protection of persons belonging to national minorities, who may fall the victim to tensions or frictions within and between States. We need to do our best in order to try to minimise the risk of the reoccurrence of tensions and conflicts based on minority issues in the OSCE region and promote mutual respect and understanding.

Focusing simply on combating discrimination against persons belonging to minorities cannot on its own create a society which is free from discrimination. We must be more proactive in this respect, therefore, it is extremely important to improve knowledge about discrimination and to raise awareness among the population both of their rights and also of the benefits of diversity. No progress can be achieved in this area without sound integration policies and education programmes. Promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is indispensable for ensuring understanding between individuals, communities and societies.

Discrimination is a very persistent phenomenon. If we truly want to make the OSCE region a place of social cohesion and mutual understanding, we should continuously promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and strive to ensure that all members of our societies are provided with equal opportunities to fully participate in the economic, political, social and cultural life, thus preventing social and political exclusion.

In view of the current challenges, the OSCE, with its expertise, instruments and mechanisms, can and should play a greater than ever role in minimising ethnic tensions, and promoting tolerance, non-discrimination and respect of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, which influence the security situation in the OSCE area.

The EU reiterates its full support for the High Commissioner on National Minorities Ambassador Knut Vollebaek and commends his activities. We call on all OSCE participating States to continue to co-operate closely with the HCNM on all matters related to national minorities and make full use of his assistance and expertise.

The EU highly values and supports the work done by ODIHR in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination. We believe that there is scope for further co-

ordination of efforts in this field with other relevant international organisations, including the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

We also appreciate the important role of OSCE field operations in minimising ethnic tensions and promoting programmes aimed at building trust and understanding.

The EU is convinced that in order to overcome the challenges in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination, adequate involvement of all segments of civil society in the formulation and implementation of relevant strategies and policies on non-discrimination should be ensured. The participation of non-governmental organisations in this process is indispensable.

The EU looks forward to this important working session, which gives us an excellent opportunity to highlight existing challenges and exchange positive experiences and best practices in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination in the OSCE area.

Thank you.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA and SERBIA, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

**Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.