

PC.DEL/941/07
9 October 2007

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

**STATEMENT BY THE
PORTUGUESE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION AT THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE
ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Cordoba, 9 and 10 October 2007

Session 1

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to take the floor in this assembly on behalf of the European Union.

I should like, first of all, to express my gratitude to Spain for its warm hospitality and my appreciation to Mr. Moratinos, OSCE Chairman-in-Office, for initiating and organizing this conference.

There are many reasons why the European Union, as such, is anxious that its voice should be heard at the Cordoba Conference on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims.

A community of values that is based on the solemn commitment of its member States to respecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that upholds freedom of expression and freedom of religion and conviction, including the freedom to change one's religion or to have no religion, the European Union gives very high priority to combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, whether based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or convictions, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Indeed, it is the conviction of the European Union that any form of intolerance represents an unacceptable affront to human dignity and must be combated with complete determination. In other words, the idea of a hierarchy between manifestations of hatred, or between their victims, would be not merely alien but contrary to the values that the European Union embodies and defends.

The struggle against intolerance, however, requires a thorough understanding of the various forms in which it is manifested. In this connection, the initiative taken by Spain, in the context of its Chairmanship of the OSCE, to highlight discrimination against Muslims

represents an opportunity to share our thoughts and our conclusions regarding the causes and the specific characteristics of this form of intolerance, and to compare our views on means of combating it.

The member States of the European Union have much to contribute to this debate. According to a study published in 2006 by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, which has since been replaced by the European Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Union includes a population of Muslim origin, or culture, estimated at about 13 million. This population does not represent a homogeneous community but is characterized by a diversity of legal and social situations, ethnic origins and cultural and religious practices.

According to the European Monitoring Centre, this population frequently suffers from a negative image and includes many, particularly among the young, whose opportunities for social advancement are limited and who are exposed to social exclusion and discrimination. The Monitoring Centre also observes that cases of discrimination are not always adequately identified and recorded.

It is to be noted, however, that the manifestations of rejection and discrimination in question are not necessarily motivated by hostility towards a religion but are often linked to economic and social factors. The European Union is convinced that an open and inclusive dialogue is needed to fight all forms of exclusion and promote mutual understanding among the various components of society. The task of integration calls for efforts by the whole of society, including the groups concerned.

The European Union is totally resolved to combat this threat to human dignity and the social cohesion of its member States. In support of its political commitment, the Union has equipped itself with ambitious instruments, through several directives requiring member States to strengthen their legislative arsenal for the battle against discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity, and for the prosecution of offences of a racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic nature, particularly hate crimes.

I should also like to recall that the European Union has been innovative in promoting the establishment of independent authorities to fight discrimination, with the threefold mission of: offering practical assistance to victims in asserting their rights and obtaining redress for prejudice they have suffered; performing a function of vigilance and monitoring with regard to manifestations of intolerance; and making recommendations on policies to combat discrimination.

Mr. Chairman,

I should like, in addition, to take this opportunity to reaffirm the full support of the European Union for the work done within the OSCE framework to promote tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual respect.

We all remember the conferences organized in recent years in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Cordoba and, more recently, Bucharest. They all bear witness to a broad political consensus, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, in favour of defending and promoting the commitments relating to tolerance and non-discrimination enshrined in OSCE documents.

I should also like to say how much the European Union appreciates the assistance furnished to the participating States by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, whether in the area of developing the capacities of civil society, whose contribution to combating intolerance is essential, of strengthening the machinery to combat hate crimes or of developing programmes for education in tolerance and mutual respect, to mention only some examples.

Lastly, I wish to pay tribute to the dedication to the three personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office, Ms. Anastasia Crickley, Ambassador Ömür Orhun and Mr. Gert Weisskirchen, whom the European Union thanks for their contribution towards enhancing the visibility of the OSCE's efforts.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, and before leaving the floor to representatives of the European Union who would like to give their countries' views in order to complement this introductory statement, permit me again to thank you for the organization of this conference and to express the hope that it will allow progress to be made in identifying the causes of and possible responses to manifestations of intolerance and discrimination.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

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