



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

Address by

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to the

Expert Meeting on Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE region

[Check against delivery]

Online, 1 February 2021

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Swedish Chairpersonship for organizing this expert meeting on addressing anti-Semitism in the OSCE region. We are all aware of the important role that Sweden plays in our work against anti-Semitism. It is heartening to learn that so many of the issues that Her Excellency Madam Chairperson-in-Office highlighted in her speech today are also the priorities of my institution. I welcome this opportunity to address this unique audience of experts and share my thoughts on a topic that, despite the lessons of history, continues to be of grave concern in the OSCE region and globally.

The function of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was established in 1992 to address tensions and prevent conflicts involving national minorities. Just one year later, the OSCE participating States, at a Ministerial Council held in Rome, invited “the High Commissioner on National Minorities, in light of his mandate, to pay particular attention to all aspects of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.” This entails protecting and promoting diversity as an inherent part of my mandate.

Today’s meeting testifies once again to the importance that the OSCE places on addressing anti-Semitism. Its timing is symbolic: on 27 January, we marked *International Holocaust Remembrance Day*. It is only through remembering the lessons of this dark period in Europe’s history that we can hope to avoid repeating the mistakes that can lead to genocide and mass atrocities. That is why, today, the imperative of “Never Again” should be accompanied with a *promise of “Zero Tolerance”*. Zero tolerance for anti-Semitic discrimination and anti-Semitic acts. Remembering the victims of the Holocaust and learning from it requires that we take concrete *preventive measures* that lay the foundations for and help build lasting cohesiveness in our societies. Today, as never before, all the OSCE participating States should reiterate their understanding and agreement that peace, security and development *can only be durable when it is grounded* in tolerance and integration.

Despite the commitments and measures taken by the OSCE family to root out anti-Semitism, it remains a pressing minority rights challenge. We are seeing incidents of anti-Semitic violence rising across the OSCE area. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this trend,

with scapegoating and discrimination against minorities spreading. During this global crisis, we observe a dangerous rise in conspiracy theories that have clear anti-Semitic motives or are built on anti-Semitic tropes. Bluntly speaking, this pandemic is reviving ancient prejudices and stereotypes, and giving them a new spin. This trend is of great concern to all of us.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to share with you some practical *preventive actions*, based on my institution's experience, that we can take, and which can play a key role in building more democratic, cohesive and peaceful societies. Because democratic, cohesive and peaceful societies are more resilient to the risks of fragmentation posed by inter-ethnic discord.

First, we must actively **stand together against discrimination**, stereotyping and anti-Semitism by sharing positive and inclusive narratives. I would like to put an emphasis on “actively” – we all know that indifference and inaction can lead to mass atrocities and genocide. If we really want to prevent discrimination, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, we need to take a long-term approach and tackle the root causes. My institution has published nine thematic Recommendations and Guidelines over the past 25 years, which offer concrete guidance to participating States in their efforts to protect minority rights and promote the integration of their diverse societies. These cover thematic areas such as education, language, participation, media, policing and access to justice, as they relate to minorities. They provide general principles that States can adapt to their local contexts and use to develop legislation and policies that improve the situation of minorities and inter-ethnic relations in general.

Education is our most powerful tool in promoting positive narratives and countering stereotypes, hatred and ignorance. In our advice to participating States, my institution emphasizes the importance and value of including teaching about human rights, minority rights and tolerance, and promoting diversity and pluralism, in school curriculums. Education has a powerful role to play in teaching the next generation how to avoid stereotyping and embrace diversity. It can help our societies avoid the dangers inherent in “us and them” narratives. We also recommend that States take initiatives to build young people's resilience to resist extremist ideologies and prejudice. Raising awareness and teaching the skills to avoid stereotyping should not be limited to schools: we recommend that States conduct awareness trainings for

policy-makers and law-enforcement personnel. And youth should not just be considered a target group for national policies and programmes: they can and should be at the forefront of our long-term conflict prevention efforts.

Education is also an important component of **the imperative of remembrance**. This leads me to a trend we see that emphasizes the differences and distances between ethnicities and States. We see that often, where **political disputes** emerge over what to remember and what to forget, these narratives also overlap with ethnic divisions. This can result in minorities feeling that their historical experience is not adequately reflected in official narratives. Such perceptions can be closely linked to the painful processes of “digesting” past traumas. Bearing this in mind, addressing widespread ignorance of the Holocaust and its lessons can help us build a common historical consciousness of this dark chapter in our history. We have a responsibility to ensure that future generations do not forget these lessons. And this requires that we all take conscious, collective, active efforts. In this respect, *The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* encourage participating States to include teaching about the histories and cultures of their minorities in the general compulsory curriculum, as it contributes to strengthening understanding, tolerance and mutual acceptance within the State.

The genocide did not begin in the gas chambers – it began with words. History teaches us that we have to *recognize hate speech and hate crimes* as clear early warning signs in order to prevent atrocity crimes. History also teaches us that we have a clear responsibility to address **hate speech** wherever we encounter it. Today, this often means in social media, which is increasingly becoming fertile ground where incitement to discrimination, intolerance and even violence against Jews and other minorities grows unchecked. In February 2019, my institution published *The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age*. This document provides States with practical advice on how the media, and in particular, digital media, can be harnessed as a powerful tool for preventing conflicts and building resilient, integrated societies.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by saying that the prevalence of anti-Semitism – together with racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination – in our societies are clear warning signs that

we need to do much better in managing diversity and supporting integration processes in our multi-ethnic societies. We need to commit strongly to taking concrete action against anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination. That is why, today, I am hopeful that we can take this opportunity to build an expert coalition and provide government officials, parliamentarians and representatives of civil society with concrete recommendations and advice on how to prevent and counter anti-Semitism, with a special emphasis on the role of youth in the process.

Once again, I welcome this initiative of the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and I look forward to our discussion.