

**Statement by  
Ambassador Guido Lenzi  
Head of the Italian Delegation to the  
OSCE Conference on  
Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual  
Respect and Understanding  
(Bucarest, June 7-8, 2007)  
Opening Plenary Session**

On behalf of Italy, I wish first of all to thank President Basescu and Minister Cioroianu for the renewed hospitality in Bucarest, and the Chairman in office Minister Moratinos for having given us another opportunity to go "beyond tolerance". To assess, in other words, the road we have undertaken together since the Cordoba Declaration, two years ago, with respect not only to the most odious and visible manifestations of intolerance, which most obviously disqualify themselves, but also and maybe especially to the most subtle and devious expressions of it.

In this new century in the history of humanity, in a world described as "flat", globalised, the main new common feature is a freedom of movement of untried proportions, allowing for the widest possible dissemination of ideas, resources, persons, indiscriminately. With an accumulation, a juxtaposition, often a superposition of multiple aspirations and identities, at times contradictory.

A more urgent need of mutual comprehension and respect results from it, in balancing out diversified expectations that are not necessarily incompatible, provided that they converge. Basically, as this shared space expands, and with the democratisation of relationships that results from it both nationally and internationally, a participatory multilateralism must develop, with the comprehensive and cooperative mechanisms that OSCE itself has for decades embodied and promoted.

At the paneuropean level, such a process consists in the completion of the political, social and economic reintegration of our continent. In 1951, one of the greatest federalists of all time, Denis de Rougemont, a Swiss, asserted that "diversity is ... a fundamental condition of our spirit of invention, of creativiuty, a condition that is summed up in local tradition, language, party, nation, and even religion. If Europe had been deprived of the concept of opposition and non-conformity, it would never have progressed beyond the age of fifth-century barbarians; it would have remained at the level of fallen Rome. It was this web of creative contradictions and antagonisms which throughout the ages was the generator of our civilisation"

The distinctive criterion of our common new Europe, in its own interest and as a possible model for international co-habitation, implies an ever greater *unity in diversity*, in the promotion of pluralism as the very essence of democracy. In our own ever more heterogeneous societies, it is not only a matter of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, but rather of participation in sharing civic responsibilities, developing multiple identities, avoiding marginalisation and self-marginalisation, integrating without indiscriminate assimilations, in the mutual respect and understanding, in the of sharing rights and duties.

New components are in fact adding up in our societies, especially recent immigration, mostly Islamic, and Rom and Sinti communities, which deserve a more specific attention.

In the activity of education to dialogue and integration undertaken, Italy, a country historically heterogeneous, is systematically engaged, on the basis of its Constitution, in its daily practice. The Italian legislation and administration, at the local level also, are among the most generous in this respect.

Internationally, Italy has just been elected to the UN Human Rights Council, and actively partakes to the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms as well as to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. During its Presidency of the European Union in 2003, Italy produced a *Declaration* of the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs on Inter-religious Dialogue and Social Cohesion, that is being made available to you today.

At the national level, according to Art.8 of the Constitution, *Agreements* have been reached that regulate relations with various religions in a framework of full freedom of religion, conscience and laicity of the State. With Muslim communities, which do not have a joint representative organism, a special *Consultative body (Consulta) for Italian Islam* has been established in 2005, with the intention of making available a forum for dialogue with the different expressions, significant even if not representative, of Islam in Italy

Furthermore, since 2004 at the Ministry of Interior an *Interministerial Committee against discrimination and Antisemitism* has been set up, in order to monitor any regression towards forms of discrimination in its various expressions and to identify the most appropriate educational and legal instruments. Also, an *Observatory on Antisemitism* and a *National Office against Racial Discrimination* have been established in 2004 at the Prime Minister's Office (a publication about it in English is at your disposal).

A draft law just approved by the Government has increased the *criminal sanctions* for acts of discrimination of any kind, in the belief

that they can be preparatory to other graver crimes or emulatory acts. Imprisonment for up to three years is foreseen for anyone who spreads ideas based on racial or ethnical superiority or hate.

Today, I would like to elaborate in particular on the recent Italian initiative of a *Charter on the Values of Citizenship and Integration*, of which you will find at your disposal the English version. An initiative that addresses the specificity of immigration, requiring on the one hand improved management and on the other modalities of harmonious cohabitation that exclude discriminatory practices.

The document, presented last april by the Home Minister whom I here today especially represent, considers the issue from a positive and proactive, not a repressive or restraining, standpoint, seeking the utmost cohesive social integration of immigrants. It spells out principles and values valid for whomever lives in Italy, regardless of the group or community that they belong to.

The Charter, produced by a group of experts in close consultation with organisms representing various migrant and religious communities, is divided into seven sections: it starts with a description of the Italian historical and cultural tradition, with reference also to European and international human rights documents; it then stresses the dignity of human beings, with respect to the equality of their rights and duties, and of social rights with special reference to the conditions of work, health, school, education and information; it also addresses the principles upon which marriage, family and the new generations rest; the laicity of the State in a context of pluralism and religious freedom is then indicated; and finally the international commitments to which Italy adheres are mentioned, in a political framework of peace and respect among nations, against war and terrorism.

The Charter is not a legal text, being mainly designed to assist the process of full integration of immigrants. The Ministry of Interior has stressed that, while the Charter is not rigid and impersonal, it is however inspired by principles shared by Europe as a whole, and therefore even more stringent.

The Italian activities in the areas considered converge with those of the Council of Europe and the European Union, which has proclaimed 2008 as the Year of Intercultural Dialogue and that finds in its Agency for Fundamental Rights just established in Vienna its most apt practical expression. Many *Euro-mediterranean initiatives* are also being promisingly undertaken, under the aspect of inter-cultural dialogue and development of a partnership on migratory matters.

It is not only a matter of appropriate legislation, but especially of education to the knowledge of one's self as well as of the other. To that end, among governments as much as in civil society one must multiply the opportunities of exchange of best practices and experiences, with a more systematic data collection and the elaboration of common indicators, in order to set in motion virtuous endeavours that may break the vicious circles appearing in the minds of too many, at times instrumentally, for purposes quite different from those from those openly proclaimed. This implies that integration becomes co-participation, that tolerance turns into acceptance, that diversity reconciles with solidarity and individual rights combine with the relevant responsibilities, that freedom of thought does not become refusal or, worse, hostility based on prejudice and ideological repulsion. Freedom of expression must lead to dialogue and not incitement to hate and violence, radicalisation and extremism.

During the Enlightenment, where it all started, Voltaire used to say that he was firmly intolerant to intolerance.

The wider spaces that have opened up in Europe and globally provide all of us with a range of new challenges and opportunities, making it indispensable to forestall the conditioned reflexes of agoraphobia, defensive, nationalistic, tribal, using instead the equally novel means of communication, education and dialogue leading to an improved knowledge of each other and a cross fertilization that the new conditions of world-wide coexistence suggest and allow.