

OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting on Promoting Inter-cultural, Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Understanding (Almaty, 12-13 June 2006)

Session III: National, regional and international initiatives to promote inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and civil society partnerships

Intervention by the representative of the Netherlands

Ms Chair,

The murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh for producing a film which was considered provocative to muslims has stimulated renewed interest in integration issues and especially in the relationship between muslims and non-muslims in Dutch society.

When talking about dialogue and tolerance, this implies that we try to better understand each other and try to find common ground without renouncing our own basic principles, including the right to freedom of expression.

I would like to draw your attention to two recent initiatives which may be useful to others as well.

First, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs will support the Netherlands Helsinki Committee in organising a round-table with people from Morocco (including Dutch citizens of Moroccan origins) as a civil society follow-up to the OSCE Seminar with Mediterranean Partners held last year in Rabat.

We think that partnerships between NGO's of different cultural backgrounds may lead to better understanding and provide the kind of dialogue which has been missing in a society which was supposed to be a tolerant society, but where tolerance often meant ignoring each other and simply minding your own business.

In the present circumstances that is no longer possible: inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is everybody's business.

Secondly, I may refer to a recent report produced by the independent Scientific Council for Government Policy. This is a body composed of academicians and researchers who can give independent advice to government on policy matters.

Their most recent report is called "Dynamism in Islamic Activism. Reference Points for Democratisation and Human Rights". An English summary is available outside this room and on the website: www.wrr.nl. A full English version will be available in September.

The report investigates the characteristics and dynamics of "Islamic activism" in a global perspective. More specifically, it looks at Islamic political thought, Islamic political movements and Islamic law.

The report finds that Islamic activism does offer a number of reference points for democratisation and human rights. Each of the three dimensions just mentioned shows, in this respect, great diversity and dynamism. Even though these are only tentative reference points

and much uncertainty still exists, the report comes to the conclusion that it would be inaccurate to assume that “Islam” in a general sense is at odds with the acceptance of democracy and human rights.

On this basis the report formulates a number of policy recommendations for the Netherlands and for the EU which the Netherlands Government is presently studying. Recommendations include concrete steps to enter into dialogue with political parties and movements based (partially) on islam or muslim identity. The Council also recommends support for initiatives which would broaden information and knowledge about developments in the muslim world (including in our own societies) which offer reference points for democratisation and human rights.

As I said, the Netherlands Government is studying the recommendations and will present an official reaction after the summer. In the meantime, we recommend that others also study this report, in order to see how this can contribute to the broader debate, also in the OSCE, on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

I thank you for your attention.