

ENGLISH only



***Permanent Mission of Italy
to the OSCE***

*Waechtergasse 1, 1010 Vienna
tel. +431 7138920
fax +431 7182390
permanentmission@italoscevienna.org
Euoffice@osce.org*

Italian Presidency of the European Union

OSCE Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination

EU intervention in session 4: Information and Awareness Raising: the Role of the

Media in Conveying and Countering Prejudice

The EU recognises the key role that the media plays in a democratic society. The media continues to support various initiatives, raising public awareness about racism, xenophobia and intolerance and improving understanding and respect for diverse cultures, religions or beliefs. The commitment to freedom of expression has been reconfirmed in a number of OSCE documents as a basic condition for pluralistic and democratic societies. Some parts of the media have however played a negative role by stereotyping minorities, demonising immigrants and asylum seekers and stoking up prejudice by selective reporting or misrepresentation of events.

The EU also recognises that new technologies such as the internet can be a powerful weapon in combating racism. The flip side is that the internet is also frequently exploited by racist groups, either to spread hate speech or communicate with each other for the purpose of committing racist offences. We should seize the opportunity of this conference to engage with internet service providers to take more effective action against racist use of their services. We should not allow bigots and racists to hide behind the freedom of expression in order to incite to racial hatred.

Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination and improving the profile of minority communities in the media services was the subject of a conference organised by the EUMC, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, the European Broadcasting Union and the European Media Institute in 1999. The conference examined a variety of issues related primarily to media influence on these subjects and positive examples and approaches in the media designed to overcome them. This was followed up by the EUMC in 2002 with a study on racism and cultural diversity in the mass media, which sought to provide an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States. On 13 and 14 June the OSCE Representative of the Freedom of the Media organised a seminar in Amsterdam on freedom of the internet, which called for a free flow of information on the internet while combating criminal exploitation on the

internet as well. We also recall in this context the contribution by the specialised conference of the Red Cross held in June 2003.

The EU therefore advocates the elaboration by OSCE of a "Best Practise Guide" on combating the use of the Internet to promote racism or anti-Semitism. Participating states, in close co-operation with relevant OSCE institutions and human rights NGOs, would be invited to collect data on web sites and services responsible for racist hate speeches. A special emphasis would be put on education of users, and especially of young people and teachers. Suitable technical and legal solutions allowing a better fight against the use of the Internet to promote hate propaganda could be reached through permanent dialogue with the professionals of the Internet.

The EU is determined to overcome racism and discrimination. On June 16, the European Commission launched a campaign which will run until 2006 under the slogan "For Diversity, against Discrimination". This campaign aims to communicate a positive message on diversity and to raise awareness in the EU of the new EU directives and the deadlines for their implementation in 2003.

The EU also periodically conducts surveys to assess attitudes to race, ethnicity and discrimination. We are ready to contribute this material to help build a database of common facts and figures for the whole OSCE area. These surveys are an important tool to gauge the extent and location of and potential for racism and discrimination in the EU, and contribute to focusing our counter-measures more effectively. In this context, we should like to mention a recent Eurobarometer survey, according to which four fifths, i.e. the vast majority of European Union citizens, are firmly opposed to any discrimination on the basis of race, religion or ethnicity. The challenge of this Conference is to turn that opposition into effective action.

The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia and the Associated Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this contribution.