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Italian Presidency of the European Union

OSCE Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination

EU intervention in the closing session

The last day and a half has demonstrated that our efforts can be both effective and lasting only by drawing together the efforts of Governments, inter-governmental organisations and civil society. Working together and bridging the divisions within our communities is crucial to this cause. OSCE participating states have already made great advances in this direction, but there is scope to take these developments further.

The EU remains convinced that the OSCE must base its activities on a comprehensive and coherent approach across a broad range of areas covering all manifestations of intolerance. This is not just a question of coherence and balance, nor of the avoidance of duplication. It is first of all a matter of a more effective countering of racism and intolerance. Our purpose is to increase tolerance, promote respect for diversity and eliminate tension between ethnic groups.

This approach requires that the OSCE draws more from the existing pool of expertise best practices and experience acquired by its participating States and human dimension institutions, and to co-ordinate with other inter-governmental organisations. This approach should guide us at the forthcoming Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October where, under a single heading, we can consider the recommendations of the many events that covered issues of tolerance and non-discrimination this year and draw conclusions for our future work.

The importance of working with civil society has been stressed. The EU is actively supporting capacity-building of non-governmental organisations both within and outside the EU, through, for example, the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights which this year has been focussed on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination. This will be of benefit also to the OSCE. The EU's work in the field of education for tolerance, respect for diversity and the principles of democracy should bring our societies closer and help mutual understanding. Equally, the work that we are doing on mainstreaming anti-racism across core policy areas will bring added value and consistency.

Unfortunately racism and discrimination are a reality in the OSCE region. This conference marks another stage in the development of the OSCE's work to combat them. The EU believes that this commitment by the OSCE should continue and be reflected in its human dimension remit.

In each session of this conference, the European Union has made a number of recommendations that build on the discussions that were held in this and other similar events this year. We would like to emphasise the importance of following up to this and other tolerance-related events, and that this follow-up should look broadly at all forms of discrimination, including the benefits of promoting inter-faith dialogue. We would therefore make the following specific recommendations to this conference:

1. We must improve our analysis of the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance and be able to track its manifestations. That means we need better facts and figures on the situation throughout the OSCE area. For this purpose, OSCE human dimension institutions should co-operate with the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe's anti-racism mechanisms in a comprehensive approach which could include also exchanges of information and statistics on racist or xenophobic hate crimes and related data in the whole OSCE area.
2. The OSCE should also endorse interfaith dialogue as one of the pillars of its approach to combating all forms of intolerance.
3. The EU and its Member States have experience in monitoring racial discrimination and racist crimes, as well as in compiling data on these issues, through the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Another such mechanism is ECRI (the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance). In addition, the EU believes we should examine how the OSCE, and in particular ODIHR, can play a more active role in combating manifestations of racism, xenophobia and religious discrimination, as well as other forms of related intolerance. The OSCE should work closely with the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and its anti-discrimination unit, the EUMC and ECRI, making best use of data produced by them, avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort and cost.
4. OSCE human dimension institutions should also set up a database on good practices and policy from the OSCE's participating States, IGO partners and civil society and make this database available to the public.
5. In the field of the media, the EU and its member states are particularly concerned with the development of hate speeches promoting racism and xenophobia on the Internet. In this context, appropriate attention should be given to data collection, awareness-raising especially among young people and teachers, and co-operation with web professionals in order to allow the screening of hate speeches without limiting freedom of expression on the Internet. The EU looks forward to further progress in that respect at the next Warsaw HDIM.
6. Furthermore we urge universal, full and effective application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination.

7. Finally, OSCE participating states should examine their legislation to combat racial hatred and discrimination, with a view to assessing its effectiveness and making necessary changes. This review should include, where they do not exist, the establishment or designation of bodies to promote equal treatment and combat racial discrimination and racism. National human rights institutions must also play a significant role in this regard.

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.