

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2006

EU statement for the working sessions 16 and 17: Promotion of tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual respect and understanding: The implementation of OSCE commitments

12 October, Warsaw

Mr Chairperson

I am pleased to be able to address this session on the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination today on behalf of the European Union. We all agree that the problems faced by participating States on intolerance and discrimination issues are pressing ones. This has been discussed at successive Ministerial meetings where States have undertaken commitments to address these concerns. We now need to focus on implementation of these commitments.

Respect for diversity, and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination are key aspects of EU policy, both inside our borders and externally. EU Directives require all our member states to introduce legislation against discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief. We have established a monitoring centre on racism and xenophobia - the EUMC - in Vienna, which is soon to be expanded to form a Fundamental Rights Agency. We also plan to establish a Gender Institute.

We actively support the OSCE's work on intolerance issues have had the honour of hosting conferences in Vienna, Berlin, Brussels and Cordoba and visits by Personal Representatives. The conferences have all highlighted the need for participating States to maintain a concerted effort in this regard and to continue to develop partnerships with both regional and international organisations to share experiences and work toward more tolerant societies.

The OSCE's expertise is a valuable resource which should be drawn upon to confront intolerance and discrimination in all its forms wherever and whenever it occurs within the OSCE region, including discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, sex, race, sexual orientation, age or disability. The EU is, for example, deeply concerned that consenting same sex acts remain a crime in two OSCE participating States and calls on these States to decriminalise such acts.

With this in mind, the European Union welcomes ODIHR's report on Challenges and Responses to Hate Motivated Incidents in the OSCE Region, which records and makes public details of incidents motivated by racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or related intolerance, including against Muslims. We hope that it will be a useful source of information on lessons learnt in the fight against intolerance and a tool for participating States to help them implement their commitments to take effective action against hate crime.

In compiling this report, we are pleased that ODIHR was able to draw on information provided by the EUMC, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The work that these bodies undertake is invaluable. We, as States, should respond positively to requests to provide necessary data to assist in documenting the hideous crimes outlined in the report. We urge ODIHR to continue its close cooperation with other intergovernmental agencies working in the same field, to ensure that its work adds value to the fight against discrimination and intolerance and that duplication is avoided. We should also pool our national experiences and knowledge to tackle them, not least in view of their trans-border nature.

We welcome the development of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System, offering a one-stop, online access to a range of information to assist participating States in combating intolerance and discrimination. The European Union hopes that it will be used as a resource by all States who are looking at how to align individual country legislation with relevant international human rights standards.

The Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office have played a useful role in supporting ODIHR's and participating States' efforts to tackle intolerance and discrimination. By promoting effective co-ordination between States, and through sharing examples of best practice, they can help us to implement our OSCE commitments in pursuit of our goal: a real reduction in racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance across the OSCE area. We have supported this approach and recognise the contribution they have made in this respect. The European Union welcomed the extension of their roles until the end of 2006 and now looks forward to discussion on the future of their mandate.

There is worrying evidence of an increase in hate-fuelled crime across the OSCE area. We all have a legal, moral and social responsibility to act against these incidents and to prevent them from recurring. This requires effective and deterrent legislation against hate crime. It requires complete and sustained commitment by the criminal justice agencies - police, prosecutors and courts - to enforce the law and to ensure that the victims of hate crime have the trust and confidence to come forward and report crimes.

We can reinforce this action by fostering a culture of tolerance and respect between and among the various communities in our countries. We must ensure that diversity contributes to integrated, confident and tolerant societies, rather than leading to segregation, intolerance and distrust. We must encourage contact between individuals and communities, and between generations. We call upon States to take the necessary measures to promote education programmes aimed at reducing prejudices and negative stereotyping. We in Europe have a particular responsibility to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten.

The OSCE has committed previously to "increase its efforts toward the younger generation in order to build up their understanding for the need of tolerance". The EU welcomes the fact that greater engagement with youth is the main focus of this session, recognising that they are often both the perpetrators and victims of crimes motivated by hatred. The active engagement of young people is key to ensuring a tolerant and cohesive society in the future. Much work is already being done with and by youth groups to increase awareness of tolerance issues. This should be encouraged and supported by all participating States.

The European Commission adopted in June 2005 a communication setting a framework strategy for Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All. This included a proposal to designate 2007 "European Year of Equal Opportunities for All". The core themes lend themselves well to

this process: raising awareness of the right to equality and non-discrimination; stimulating debate on ways to increase the participation of under-represented groups in society; celebrating and accommodating diversity; and promoting a more cohesive society. There will be opportunity to evaluate and share those experiences with participating States in the course of future meetings.

Mr Chairperson

The promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination continues to be a key priority for the European Union. Everyone, regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation must be able to enjoy their human rights and be protected from discrimination in the spirit of tolerance that marks this meeting. We urge all participating States to work with ODIHR and the Personal Representatives to raise awareness of this important issue and to spread best practice within the OSCE region. To do this, we must all concentrate on implementation of existing commitments. Hate crime and discrimination do not just harm the individual. They damage the whole of society. Between us, let us ensure they have no place in the OSCE region.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia ¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process