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STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. LÁSZLÓ KOVÁCS
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY
OSCE CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND THE FIGHTS AGAINST RACISM, XENOPHOBIA
AND DISCRIMINATION
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Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Partners,

I have the honour to greet you here at this prominent OSCE forum. Above all I would like to express my appreciation to our Belgian hosts for this excellently organised Conference, where we have the opportunity to exchange our views on this issue of high importance. The Government of the Republic of Hungary treats with special attention the issue of Intolerance, Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination.

Hungary shares the view that the fight against racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism should be handled as a whole, in a so-called 'holistic' manner.

Hungary attributes great importance to the commitment of the OSCE Participating States to the unanimous condemnation of all manifestations of anti-Semitism, and all other acts of intolerance. We strongly believe that the participating states should strive to ensure that their legal systems foster a safe environment free from anti-Semitic harassment, violence or discrimination in all fields of life.

The Hungarian Government has taken strong actions in order that its legislation provide more appropriate and secure environment for all its citizens. In this regard let me enumerate briefly the latest relevant governmental measures:

1. After two years preparatory work, in December 2003 the Hungarian Parliament adopted the bill on **Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities (Act CXXV of 2003)**. By passing the anti-discrimination act Hungary made a significant step in the

process of legal harmonisation (with special regard to the EU Council Guideline 43/2000 on Equal Treatment Regardless of Racial and Ethnic Origin, and EU Council Guideline 78/2000 on Equal Treatment in Employment and the Establishment of a General Quota in Employment). The act, which came into force in January 2004 also meets the requirements established by the OSCE Maastricht Ministerial Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination.

The anti-discrimination act not only prohibits discrimination in more cases than listed in the two EU directives and in the Maastricht Ministerial Decision, but it also contains itemized listing and incorporates the terminology of “any other characteristics whatsoever”.

For the efficient implementation of its provisions the 78/2000 Racial Equality Directive sets up the requirement of establishing a body for the promotion of equal treatment. In Hungary the post of the **Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights (established by Act LIX of 1993)** fulfils this requirement on the one hand. It is the responsibility of the minorities' ombudsman to investigate or ensure the investigation of any abuses of constitutional rights brought to the ombudsman's attention, and to initiate general or individual measures to remedy such abuse. On the other hand the anti-discrimination act orders the setting up of an administrative authority with the overall responsibility of ensuring compliance with the principle of equal treatment, not only on the ground of racial or ethnic origin but on the ground of any other characteristics. This body will start its work on 1 January 2005. Furthermore, the elaboration of the government Program for Equal Treatment with the active participation of NGOs is underway. The program will be approved by Parliament biennially.

The Hungarian Government places particular emphasis on the promotion of the situation of the minorities living in Hungary. In Hungary the Gypsy population forms the largest ethnic minority, estimates put their number at around half million persons. It is the Roma community which is mainly and most severely stricken by social discrimination in all fields of life. The Roma policy of the Hungarian government is characterised by efforts to promote their social integration, to reduce prejudice and social discrimination and at the same time by reinforcing their cultural identity.

2. The Government Decree (1021/2004) approved in March 2004 is a complex medium-term

action plan which specifies the tasks of all the ministries with regard to the promotion of the quality of life, social integration and equal opportunities of the Roma. The novelty of the action plan is the introduction of a monitoring system for the tight control of the use of financial resources spent on Roma programs by the ministries.

In order to realise the abovementioned objectives **major institutional changes** took place in the past two years, reinforcing the governmental institutions in charge of enhancing the social integration of the Roma.

a. In the Prime Minister's Office a **Political State Secretary for Roma Affairs** was **nominated** and, in accordance with the government program, **ministries started to recruit civil servants of Roma origin** for the posts of ministerial commissioners (Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Cultural Heritage) and desk officers at relevant portfolios.

b. In 2003 the government has been enlarged with the post of **Minister without Portfolio for Equal Opportunities to serve the interests of socially disadvantaged groups** and to take care of it in the government's policy. In January 2004 with the establishment of the Government Office for Equal Opportunities the scope of government agencies responsible for representing the interests of the disadvantaged social groups, including the Roma, was further extended.

Legal provisions in the matter of anti-discrimination in Hungary are not words on a piece of paper without enforcement. In 2001 the Hungarian Ministry of Justice, the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities and the National Gypsy Self-Government set up an **Anti-Discrimination Legal Advice Network** in order to provide free legal advice for those who suffered grievance as a result of their Roma origin. The network operates 27 regional offices nation-wide and, in addition to legal advice, the free service includes also the clients' representation before the court and other authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am convinced that **culture and religion** have conciliatory role in society. The different groups of civil society representing different religions and cultures have enormous

responsibility for fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue and partnership to promote tolerance, mutual understanding and respect.

We remain convinced that examination of specific aspects of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue as well as legal and institutional measures for combating discrimination and intolerance should be kept on the agenda to promote peaceful cohabitation of different cultural, religious or ethnic groups throughout the OSCE area.

As it is mentioned in the Opatija Declaration adopted by the cultural ministers of the Member States of the Council of Europe in September 2003, besides joint European efforts, the national priorities should also be taken into consideration. Our national priority in Hungary is granting cultural rights to the 13 registered ethnic and national minority groups and by efficient governmental support to help them to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity as is formulated in the **Act LXXVII on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities of 1993**.

The Hungarian society is characterised by religious diversity. There are more than 100 registered religious communities. While the state budget provides financial support for schools, caritative institutions run by the churches, the citizens have the opportunity of tax refunding for the benefit of NGOs and churches and allocate a certain amount of their private income tax directly to them.

We share the view that the increasing cultural diversity of most society includes the requirement of knowing other groups and the need to establish partnership through different cultural events.

The vivid cultural life conducted by religious communities and ethnic groups has a great share in the elimination of prejudices and fostering mutual understanding and respect. For instance the **Week of Jewish Culture** is a good example for that. The autumn festival of the Jewish community in Budapest and in a number of other Hungarian towns attracts more and more visitors every year and the Jewish Klezmer music is getting more and more popular among the young.

It is our responsibility to bring up a tolerant new generation without prejudice and negative stereotypes. We put special emphasis on the education system, which has the opportunity and devices to address specific national or local manifestations of racism, xenophobia and

discrimination. The success of our efforts is reflecting in the establishment of the **Holocaust Museum**, opened in April 2004, which attracts so many visitors that the opening hours had to be extended.

We agree with the opinion that the promotion of respect for each individuals' cultural, religious or ethnic identity in the context of social integration is a significant part of the educational process. This aspect was taken into consideration when the memento of the **Holocaust Memorial Day** (16 April) was included in the curriculum of Hungarian secondary schools. **The film** adaptation of the **Nobel-Prize winning novel by Imre Kertész, "Fateless"** was co-financed by a government fund.

It seems to be evident that vivid intercultural dialogue is one of the causes why anti-Semitism shows a significant decrease in Hungary. According to the latest poll by the Hungarian Gallup Institute in the course of ten years anti-Semitism decreased to less than half (from 14-15% to 6-7%) and there has also been a significant decrease in openly represented prejudice against the Roma.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that we achieved considerable development in our struggle against racism, discrimination and intolerance, but the fight must go on to improve the conditions and provide equal opportunities for all Hungarian citizens. I am sure that we are on the right track.

Thank you for your attention.