

Intervention by the Delegation of Romania
at the
OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

Cordoba, 9-10 October 2007

Mr. Chairman, Dear participants

Allow me to join the previous speakers in congratulating the Spanish Chairmanship in Office for initiating this Conference and hosting it with such warm hospitality in this beautiful town of Cordoba, highly symbolic, by its history and its present, for a harmonious life of respect and understanding among different religious communities.

We perceive this specific and detailed debate on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as a natural extension of the more comprehensive view towards discrimination that was at the core of debates during the High-level OSCE Conference held last June in Romania.

Indeed, if we recognise that all manifestations of discrimination and intolerance are a threat to the security of individuals and societal cohesion - as the Bucharest Declaration was highlighting - we need to stand firmly committed in combating – and, hopefully, preventing - each and every form of it. Discrimination against Muslims is definitely a topic that requires our attention, because of its scale, because of its dynamics, because of its complex implications. We need to strengthen our political will and our tools, while adapting them for fighting traditional or new forms of discrimination, for protecting traditional or new target groups. To this end, we have to draw lessons from each other and also from history, to multiply good practices and to void previous mistakes.

I would like to stress what it has been pointed out in the EU Statement. The EU Member States have made a top priority from fighting against all forms of intolerance and discrimination. It shows the determination of the EU - a community of values which highly appreciates the freedom of thought, religion and belief. As a country placed at a crossroads of cultures, Romania has developed, over centuries, a culture of coexistence, mutual understanding and respect, both among its various ethnic and religious communities, and for its neighbours in the wider region of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

It is true that the Muslim community in Romania, of about seventy thousand persons is not big, compared to the thirteen million estimated number of Muslims in Europe. But this does not involve a weaker commitment for ensuring them equal rights and fundamental freedoms as to any other citizen of Romania, and for protecting them against any form of discrimination.

Out of this total number, most are Turks - about 33 thousands - and Tatars - about 25 thousands, who have been living on the territory of Romania for up to 8

centuries. A smaller number are Albanians or Roma people, while in the last two decades a new wave of Muslims have arrived to Romania as immigrants from Turkey and the Mediterranean Arab countries.

The Muslims in Romania lead freely their religious life. They have 80 Mosques and their clerics are trained in the Theological Muslim and Pedagogical Highschool in the Romanian town Medgidia. Since the wide majority of the Muslims are at the same time members or ethnic minorities living in Romania, they also benefit of the right to be politically represented in the Lower Chamber of Parliament, where their organisations - the *Turkish Democratic Union of Romania* and the *Democratic Union of the Turkish-Muslim Tatars* – hold two seats.

The *Law on combating all forms of discrimination*, in force in Romania since 2002, provides to the Muslims minority, as to all other groups that might be subject of discrimination on ground of their differences, an adequate framework to address and to sanction acts of discrimination in any field. The autonomous institution set up in Romania to implement this law – the *National Council for Combating Discrimination* – is here represented at top level, to testify about their experience.

For centuries we have coexisted with the Turks and Tatars. This helped us to know and understand them better in spite of the historical difficulties that we have had experienced together. Ultimately, this played a positive role in the development of an open attitude towards Muslim newcomers. Their arrival was not merely “tolerated”, but truly welcomed by the Romanian society, who perceived them as an enriching presence.

It might be useful to look deeper and try to understand the grounds of such an attitude, deprived of resentments or rejection towards persons often coming sometimes from a country which, for centuries, was perceived as the “dominator” or “enemy” by the Romanians.

As I already said, we strongly believe that one key element to explain this process is mutual knowledge and understanding of each other’s culture and traditions. This implies a paramount role for the education sector.

A second key element is mutual respect for each other’s identity, and this is one thing that political and community leaders can efficiently foster through responsible public discourse and through their leading example.

We welcome the fact that two Plenary Sessions of this conference are dedicated to these important topics.

I am confident that education and respect can really lead, beyond tolerance, towards acceptance, mutual understanding and cooperation, to the benefit of all components of our societies.

Thank you for your attention.

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