



PC.DEL/491/04  
16 June 2004

ENGLISH only

**Permanent Mission of Ireland  
to the OSCE**

Rotenturmstrasse 16-18,  
A-1010 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 71576 9826  
Fax: +43 1 715  
5755

ireland-osce@chello.at

## **Irish Presidency of the European Union**

---

**Statement by Mr. Willie O’Dea, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of  
Justice Equality and Law Reform, on behalf of the European Union,  
to the OSCE meeting**

**on**

**The Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and anti-Semitic Propaganda on  
the Internet and Hate Crimes**

**Paris, 16-17 June 2004**

I am honoured to deliver this address on behalf of the European Union at the OSCE meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes.

The EU warmly salutes the leadership of the French government in hosting this important meeting. We applaud the inclusion in our discussions of representatives of governments, of international organisations along with representatives of civil society and the Internet industry. The EU hopes that this Paris meeting of key actors on this vital issue will strengthen our partnership to combat racist propaganda on the Internet. We hope that our discussions advance the OSCE’s overall drive against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance.

The EU is very grateful for the efforts of the Bulgarian Chairmanship in Office in preparing this meeting. It is a key part of ongoing efforts which has already featured at the highly successful Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin in April and which will also include the forthcoming OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination to be hosted by the Belgian Government in September. The European Union fully supports the OSCE’s work on these urgent issues. We do so because we are a Union of values which believes that racism is wrong, anti-Semitism is wrong and intolerance is wrong. They have no place in modern Europe and the EU seeks partners who want to counter these potent threats to our fundamental values.

The Internet is the most powerful, most speedy and possibly the most important resource invented for people-to-people contacts in human history. Its potential for building understanding, for promoting learning for all ages, for increasing trade and investment, for opening up opportunities for dialogue are known and proven. But we know the downside too. This rich resource for global communication has been abused utterly to disseminate great evils such as vile abusive ideologies, paedophilia, to advance supremacist theories and glorification of violence and to incite hatred and discrimination on grounds of race and religion.

The great Martin Luther King almost anticipated the extent of this new phenomenon when he said:

"We are challenged to work all over the world with unshakeable determination to wipe out the last vestiges of racism...Its vicious grasp knows no geographical boundaries."

This meeting today is a timely review of the next steps we must take to ensure that what Dr. King saw as the "vicious grasp" of racist propaganda and intolerance does not hold sway on the Internet.

Our goals are clear –

We must combat propagandist and hate sites.

We must prosecute perpetrators of racist, xenophobic and hate crimes.

We must safeguard our children and young people from the crude, blunt messages of racist ideologies.

The tools we use in this battle must uphold the freedoms, the principles and values that we seek to defend. These include human rights and the dignity of each member of our human family; openness to new ideas, cultures and faiths; and belief in the right to free speech, and freedom of expression. Freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, and is one of the basic conditions for its progress and for the development of every human being.

I think we all recognise that striking this balance is a very difficult challenge. This is why we need strong resolve at international and national levels as well as strong new partnership between government and the Internet industry to overcome racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet.

The EU for its part believes that the challenge can only be met by a comprehensive holistic and integrated approach to tackling intolerance. I know that details of EU policy will be discussed in depth over the next two days and I am not therefore going to dwell on them in depth here. I would like however to highlight the three key aspects of EU policy, namely legal protection, public awareness and international co-operation which are the cornerstones of the EU's approach.

The increase in hate crimes is a matter of growing concern for the EU and the Member States. Firstly, as regards legal protection, EU Member States provide effective remedies to discrimination, intolerance, racism and anti-Semitism through their constitutional provisions and their national legal codes. Key to the EU's approach in the employment area for example, are the Directives on Racial and Employment Equality. At national level, strict laws have been adopted by Member States against the production, sale, and dissemination of racist propaganda. We are also seeing increasing fruitful dialogue between governments and Internet Service Providers, e-commerce and the telecommunications industry about standards and codes of best practice. Additionally, the industry has developed ever better tools to allow the user to filter this propaganda. These efforts should be encouraged.

Increased legal measures, supported by enhanced co-operation from the different actors on the Internet send a strong signal to the public that the dissemination of hate propaganda is wrong and will not be tolerated by the government or the private sector. This partnership at national and international level against racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet reflects other mechanisms at European level to “mainstream” anti-intolerance practices across our full range of policy activities all the while reinforcing co-operation at national level among the Union’s Member States.

As part of our overall response we have also established the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Better understanding of this phenomenon can help us to improve our policy response and may help to understand the link between Internet propaganda and hate crimes. We are very keen for the EUMC to work closely with ODIHR and the Council of Europe and are encouraged by the good efforts being made. The Safer Internet Action Plan is one example of how we are approaching the problem of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet at EU level. The current Internet Safety Action Plan promotes safer use of the Internet and new online technologies particularly for children. It spearheads the fight against illegal and harmful content by improving hotlines where the public can report dangerous Internet sites, and promotes the development of effective filtering technology to screen propaganda and racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic material. The Presidency warmly supports the agreement reached by the EU Communications Ministers in Luxembourg on 10 June to invest 45 million euro between next year and 2008 on its Safer Internet Plus plan. This represents an increase of almost 100% in funding over the first Safer Internet Programme.

My colleague Minister Brian Cowen underlined in his address at the Berlin conference on anti-Semitism, that education is key in addressing the issue of intolerance in all its forms. Education is vital to counter the fears and propaganda from which racism draws its strength. Education is the means by which we can equip our young people with the values, the skills and the maturity to rise above racism.

A key challenge is to use the immense influence which the Internet and new technologies have on young people to promote openness to other cultures and faiths and the right of people to be different. We must ensure that the Internet, which has been abused as a vehicle to propagate theories of racial superiority and anti-Semitism, becomes a formidable means of educating and changing attitudes towards intolerance for the better.

Finally, as regards effective multilateralism, the EU believes that the fight against racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism requires strengthened international co-operation on political and legal issues which are relevant to this challenge. At political level, we salute the excellent work of the OSCE to promote awareness and to build consensus on these new human rights issues. At a practical level, we stand ready to reinforce our co-operation with ODIHR in fulfilling the tasks given to it in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination at the Maastricht Ministerial Council. Furthermore we recognise the important role of the Council of Europe in addressing the issue of crime on the Internet and in promoting tolerance through the excellent work over the last ten years by the ECRI and its Convention on Cybercrime. This excellent work at regional level guides our actions on these issues in the United Nations, particularly in the annual Commission of Human Rights in Geneva.

The EU is grateful to the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media for its contribution to the preparation of this meeting. A year ago, almost to the day, a conference in Amsterdam, organised by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, produced a set of five key recommendations for the legislative framework on racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet;

- Firstly, the basic constitutional value of freedom of the media;
- Access to digital networks and the internet must be fostered;
- Criminal exploitation of the internet cannot be tolerated;
- Illegal content must be prosecuted, but the infrastructure of the internet should be left intact; and
- The industry should be encouraged to provide the user with better tools to filter this propaganda, if they or their parents so desire.

The EU fully supports these recommendations. We believe they provide the essential framework for international action to combat this problem. They also provide for a close partnership between the Internet industry, civil society and governments in tackling this problem.

The EU calls upon all OSCE participating States, NGOs, and the Internet industry to create opportunities, including during the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE next October, to promote sharing of best practices.

Furthermore we urge close co-ordination in these efforts with the UN and the Council of Europe. These best practices could then be taken into account at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia, when consideration is given to possible OSCE action toward promoting tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, and combating racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

We look forward to a successful meeting.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, align themselves with this statement.