

OSCE Chairmanship Conference on
Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims,
Cordoba, 9 and 10 October 2007
Session 1

**Statement by Mr. Hans Winkler, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for
European and International Affairs of Austria**

I thank Spain and Minister Moratinos for the initiative to hold this conference in the historic city of Cordoba, symbol of a harmonious living together of religions and civilisations. It is my pleasure to see Ambassador Orhun presiding this first session.

There is no alternative to an open and frank dialogue to find solutions for the problems of contemporary societies. The OSCE is one of the privileged fora for the discussion about the fight against intolerance and discrimination, racism and radical extremism. What is important, however, is now to take action and implement the many commitments we have entered into inside and outside OSCE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fight against racism, discrimination and intolerance must take place on different levels:

1. States bear a large share in the responsibility to fight intolerance and discrimination. States have to create a framework where discrimination can not find a fruitful ground to emerge. Therefore we have to ensure the necessary social, economic, institutional and also legal framework for a life free from discrimination. States ultimately have to ensure prosecution and punishment by independent courts when rules or laws are violated.
2. Political leaders, political parties and parliaments must assume their responsibility. It is indeed concerning that discrimination, exclusion and verbal aggression become too often part of a populist rhetoric, especially during election campaigns.
3. International and regional bodies, such as ODIHR, the Council of Europe's ECRI, the United Nations' CERD and, for the EU, the new Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna, have a role to play and are in our view very crucial institutions to support these efforts.
4. Civil society, in particular organisations of members of minorities, have to participate in the process.

Muslims have been living in Europe for decades or even centuries. The most important prerequisite for a peaceful coexistence of different religious and ethnic groups is the participation of *all* citizens in all sectors of life on the basis of the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression.

There are many aspects in the fight against intolerance and discrimination. Let me just mention four:

1. Non-discrimination of religious communities and legal recognition:

In Austria Islam was granted official recognition already in 1912. Of course, we face similar challenges like many other Western countries as far as integration is concerned. But legal recognition of Islam and a clear legal basis have proven to be a good basis for constructive dialogue and problem-solving co-operation. I fully agree with Secretary General Amr Moussa that we must not accept the opinion of those, who say that the clash of civilisations is inevitable.

2. Education and awareness-raising on all levels of our societies is of the highest importance in order to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices which nourish racism, intolerance and discrimination.

3. We must offer an economic perspective to all members of society. Too many young people with migration and/or Muslim background in our countries suffer from unemployment, too little prospect for economic independence and social advancement. We have to take the right measures to avoid an identity vacuum. The search for identity as a community but also for a European identity is difficult; we must help them. And let me just say in response to Prof. Ansari that reservations that might exist in relation to the adhesion of Turkey to the EU in many countries including my own are not motivated by ideological or religious considerations.

4. We must elaborate concrete projects on the regional, but above all on the local level. We have to develop concrete projects that make people co-operate, work together and commonly develop strategies for conflict resolution and co-existence. Theological debates and intellectual discourse are important. But equally we have to create a viable framework of interaction of everyday life and make pluralism work in schools, in communities etc. For example, we have to support Muslim educational institutions. Establishing faculties of Islamic theology, as well as Imam training programmes at European universities and teacher training colleges might further facilitate the prospect of engaging in a fruitful dialogue. Austria has implemented and developed a number of strategies such as a University masters programme on Islamic religious pedagogy.

Austria, together with the representatives of the Islamic Community, has initiated and supported Conferences of European Imams, the latest in 2006. Declarations adopted by these conferences have inter alia taken a clear position with regard to the necessity to develop a "Muslim European identity" and have confirmed the compatibility of Islam, democracy, rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

Austria remains committed to contribute further within and outside the OSCE in this field. We must not be discouraged. We must continue to plant the seeds for more tolerance and mutual understanding.