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**DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**  
**ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting**

**Combating racism, intolerance and discrimination in society through sport**  
**Session III**  
**19-20 April 2012**  
**Hofburg, Vienna**

**Statement by Ms. Karine Soudjian**  
**Head of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Division**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
**Republic of Armenia**

Madam Moderator,

First of all, I would like to thank the OSCE/ODIHR for organizing this event, the Irish Chairmanship for the suggested theme and all keynote speakers for their presentations.

The OSCE participating States established a normative framework to prevent and combat racism and hate crime, but within the framework of the organization – as far as I can recall – it is the first time when we have the opportunity to discuss the problem of combating racism, intolerance and discrimination in and through sport.

Undoubtedly, this theme requires special attention, taking into consideration both widespread character of sport and the significant impact which it may have as a mechanism of peace, tolerance and confidence-building.

Discrimination in sport can occur against teams, players, referees, fans and spectators, be based on religion, nationality or ethnic origin, it can manifest itself at various levels, both nationally and internationally.

Racism and intolerance may have an adverse effect and may bring harm to the *raison d'être* of sport. Here we can witness the distortion of the concept of sport as the action aimed at bridging differences and bringing people together through fair competition. Such distortions occur when sporting events are misused for the purposes of propaganda of hatred and racism against sportsmen or nations they represent.

Madam Moderator,

Before presenting our recommendations on using sport events as confidence-building measures, I would like to draw your attention to the facts showing how one of the OSCE participating States has been systematically abusing sporting events for

disseminating hatred towards Armenian sports teams, athletes and towards the entire Armenian nation.

During the opening ceremony of the youth world karate championship, in November 2005, the sportsmen of the Azerbaijani national team have verbally assaulted and attacked the Armenian team, just before they were going to enter the hall. The World Karate Federation disqualified Azerbaijan for one year.

On 9 November 2007, while commenting his clearly racist attitude towards Armenian chess players, Azerbaijani chess player Teymur Rajabov in an interview to “APA Sport” said: “The enemy is the enemy. We hate Armenians”. No reaction has followed on the part of the Azerbaijani Chess Association or the Government of Azerbaijan.

While further escalating anti-Armenian hatred and hysteria, the Azerbaijani authorities refused to allow Armenian football players to travel to Baku for the qualifying game between Armenian and Azerbaijani national teams, despite the fact that their Armenian counterparts clearly stated their readiness to secure and welcome Azerbaijani team’s visit to Yerevan. As a result, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has ruled that the qualifying matches between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the Euro 2008 championship will not take place, which in itself meant yielding to Azerbaijan’s attempt to mix politics and sports and is truly deplorable. This was twice deplorable because Armenian National team, who was playing much better, could have won both games but instead lost much needed six points.

In 2011, during the World Boxing Championships in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, Armenian sportsmen reportedly have had to compete under extraordinary pressure. The fights of Armenian athletes in Baku have been accompanied with unprecedented manifestations of hate and intolerance against Armenians. At some stage, Azerbaijani nationalists even started throwing stones at Armenian boxers and shouted anti-Armenian slogans, with racist connotation. And again, no reaction has followed from Azerbaijani authorities.

There are many other examples when not only Armenian sportsmen, but also citizens of other countries with Armenian surnames were banned or hindered entering Azerbaijan just because they are of Armenian origin as it was in the case of Russian citizen judo athlete Arsen Galstyan who had to wait at the passport control for over four hours.

Cultivating and propagating racial hatred towards Armenia and Armenians has long become the state policy of Azerbaijan, and it clearly has its toll on sports as well. A country that cultivates racial hatred at state level has no moral right to apply for or seek organizing Olympic games, as this runs against the very logic and the spirit of the Olympiads, which since ancient times served for promoting peace and conciliation between peoples.

For a long time, Azerbaijani authorities have been prohibiting any contacts with Armenians, including through sports. This effectively shuts the last few remaining bridges between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, thus making the chances for the much-desired reconciliation between our two peoples even bleaker.

Madam Moderator,

Allow me to remind, that racist propaganda at the state level is in contradiction to the spirit of the Minsk Group negotiation process as well as contrary to the basic principles of the international law, including the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE human dimension documents.

Finally, I would like to make some recommendations for the OSCE which in my opinion could help making sports a vehicle for confidence-building and promoting integration and equality.

1. Respond more actively to contemporary challenges including the cases of discrimination in sports on the basis of nationality or ethnic origin.
2. Use the mechanism of the OSCE annual reports on fight against hate crime for assessing potential risks. In this regard, I suggest discontinuing the practice whereby the countries are asked to limit their submissions only to information within national framework.
3. Devote a part of the OSCE annual hate crime report to the assessment of situation in combating racism in sports in each of the OSCE participating States.
4. Strongly and without delay condemn each and every form and manifestation of racism irrespective of the motives, and taking into consideration Ireland's experience in conflict resolution, pay closer attention to the elaboration of confidence-building programmes and measures.

Thank you