



ADDRESS

by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dr Mladen Ivanić,

**at the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and other Forms of
Intolerance,
Cordoba, 8 and 9 June 2005**

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank Minister Rupel and his staff warmly for a very efficient work during his chairmanship, and to Spanish authorities for perfect organization of this conference as well as for their hospitality.

Mr. Chairman

Allow me to inform you briefly of the results of the wide range of activities which BiH is undertaking in fight against Anti-Semitism, discrimination and all other forms of intolerance.

People of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, and others, Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox and Jews, all together have chosen the dialogue, not a division on 'us' and 'them'. Our goal is: multireligious, multiethnic, open society, and economically sustainable democratic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a natural and integral part of democratic and socially just Europe and the World.

According to European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (*ECRI*) report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is clearly stated that BiH has taken a number of positive steps towards combating racism and intolerance. These steps include the ratification of a considerable number of relevant international legal instruments. Some initiatives have been taken to address the position of other groups composing Bosnia and Herzegovina's society, such as the adoption of a Law on Protection of Rights of National Minorities and an Action Plan aimed

at accommodating the educational needs of Roma children, as well as children of other national minorities. Certain initiatives have also been taken against trafficking in human beings for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has signed and ratified many relevant international instruments in the field of combating racism and intolerance. It is a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Protocol N°12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities etc.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with international community, supports actively all measures in combating all kinds of discrimination. Bosnia and Herzegovina established five institutions that should be a guarantee in accomplishing that objective: the BiH Ombudsman, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federation Ombudsman, the Republika Srpska Ombudsman and the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. In order to maintain the dialogue and respect of religious expression and belief, in order to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence, four major religion communities in BiH established the Interreligious Council. A very prominent member of this Council, Mr. Jakob Finci, who is also the President of Jewish community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is with us today. The main goal of this Council is to achieve peace and coexistence through reconciliation. And I am happy to inform you that they are very successful in their work.

Considering a very complex ethnical structure of the country, we must work hard to promote and ensure the standards to prevent any trace of intolerance. Therefore all government structures have to coordinate their efforts to fight against Anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination. It is important to underline that not just one institution is engaged in this fight, but the whole society. The Education Reform Strategy pledges to ensure that “all children have access to quality

education, in integrated multicultural schools that are free from political, religious, cultural and other bias and discrimination.”

Mr. Chairman,

Jews are first mentioned in Sarajevo in 1541. At that time, Jewish people were on the crossroads of its destiny in Europe, but they found friendly and hospitable surroundings in BiH, and stayed and lived for almost five hundred years. Next to the churches and mosques, proudly and freely, synagogues were erected all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The arrival of Sephardim from Spain, Portugal and the western countries made Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sarajevo richer in many spheres of life and work. Jewish people contributed to our education, culture, economy and health protection, law and many other fields of life and work.

All that time Jews enjoyed security and all the conditions for a stable life and prosperous development. The result of that development was their presence in almost every part in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the World War II, and their number, reached the number of 12.000 persons, of which 10.000 Sephardim and 2.000 of Ashkenazim. The Jews were organized in some twenty Jewish communities, and Sarajevo, with three fourths of the total Jewish population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was in a way the world center of the Sephardic tradition. But Second World War and German occupation changed everything.

Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina will do everything to combat any manifestation of anti-Semitic behavior. We know that there are still actions to be taken, especially by the prominent politicians, intellectuals, religious groups or other civil society groups, in preventing any manifestation of anti-Semitism.

We agree that we should reject the identification of terrorism and extremism with one religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality or race. We also support thesis that some forms of intolerance and

discrimination may have unique characteristics and origins and require proper definition, but the methods of fighting against them are in many fields similar.

We can not neglect influence of media on possible promotions of intolerance and discrimination. In order to avoid such influence, we established Communication Regulatory Agency, which is tackling such media presentations. I am happy to inform you that such events in the media are sporadic.

Mr. Chairman

Bosnia and Herzegovina's recent history can tell straightforward what it means not to be tolerant or to discriminate somebody, just because he or she is from another religious group or ethnicity. That behavior can result in loss of many lives, destruction of the society, and destruction of the country. So far Bosnia and Herzegovina has been proven as the place to render the notion of "a clash of civilizations", null and void, but now it is on its way to become a proof that democracy, freedom and respect of human rights are universal.

Thank you for your attention

