



Opening Statement
by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Dr Solomon Passy,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria,
at the OSCE Conference on Tolerance
and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination
Brussels, 13 September 2004

Your Holiness,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Mr. Prime Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

C'est un grand honneur pour moi d'être aujourd'hui à Bruxelles à cette conférence importante sur la tolérance et la lutte contre le racisme, la xénophobie et la discrimination. Ce troisième forum, après Berlin et Paris, nous offre la possibilité, ici dans la "capitale de l'Europe", de formuler notre réponse décisive à tout acte d'intolérance, d'antisémitisme, de racisme, de xénophobie et de discrimination dans les pays membres de l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération en Europe. Je voudrais remercier le Gouvernement belge d'avoir accueilli cette manifestation importante.

(It is a great honour for me to be present today in Brussels at this important Conference on tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination. This concluding forum – after Berlin and Paris, presents us with the opportunity to sum up here, in the "capital of Europe", our decisive response rebuffing all manifestations of intolerance, anti-Semitism, islamophobia, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination in the OSCE area. I would like to thank the Belgian Government for hosting this event.)

Let me start with greetings once again to my German and French colleagues, Joschka Fischer and Michel Barnier, for the excellent organization of the two preceding conferences in, respectively, Berlin and Paris. They both helped us put the issue of tolerance and non-discrimination, so relevant in our contemporary world, high on the OSCE agenda. Let me thank once again to Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, to Foreign Minister Carl de Gucht and his predecessor Louis Michel, and the Belgian Government which built upon what was achieved in Berlin and Paris.

We are well aware of the special interest that the Royal family in Belgium takes in problems like social exclusion, education and social security in general. One of many examples are the programmes and activities of the King Baudouin Foundation, many of which are implemented in the countries of Southeast Europe.

And now let us look to the future. We all have noted the proposal of the Spanish Government to organize the 2005 OSCE Conference in Cordoba, a city of much symbolism which, I believe, will boost our joint efforts to counter this recurring evil. For obvious reasons, Spain is always among the most appropriate places to discuss the dialogue between Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Let me remind you the example of my own country, Bulgaria, which was the only European state that saved its 50 thousand Jews during the World War II. And it was done by the entire nation – politicians, intellectuals, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church through its Holy Synod – they all stood against the deportation. And those efforts succeeded due to the ingeniousness demonstrated by King Boris III on this matter. That is why Bulgaria became known as the European country which increased its Jewish population during the Second World War.

Exactly because of the legacy from the time of the Holocaust, my country, as current Chairman-in Office of the OSCE, has been raising up the urgency to respond to all forms of intolerance and discrimination as a key priority of the Organization. We need to remind ourselves, over and over again, the facts of our common history, especially the bitterest ones, so that they become firmly anchored in our memories and in the memories of the future generations. This will add essence to the awareness-raising campaigns and boost the effectiveness of our preventive measures.

After World War II, Europe started the process of its integration by building the European Coal and Steel Communities. Today, after 9/11, we need “Religion and Faith Communities” - to unite us on the grounds of our common values and the sanctity of human life. The OSCE can serve as a foundation of such a culture to grow and flourish. And I have in mind not only the specific value of the Organization but also its unique potential to involve new partners in our discussion on how to make a better world. The hardest thing to change in an Organization, is its name. And if I were to pick up a word to add to the name of the OSCE, I would put the word “tolerance” at the end, as it represents the very basis of security and cooperation. So I will dream to see OSCE become “Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe *and Tolerance*” - because we cannot have tolerance only in Europe, it should be also enjoyed universally worldwide. (By the way, changed name will help many not to mix OSCE with OECD).

Drawing on our past experience, I cannot escape mentioning the importance of inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue and partnerships. I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to extend my sincerest personal greetings to His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew the 1st whose personal experience in advancing reconciliation among Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox communities, such as in the Western Balkans, will be especially valuable in our discussion later today. Let me recall his words from the early 1990’s, that *peaceful co-existence and cooperation among peoples is possible, desirable, and profitable. Our duty is to work for the realization of this beautiful dream. If we take to heart the message of peace and become peacemakers we can succeed in many things.*

No-one can do as much harm to one religion, and no-one can create more enemies to one religion than its own false prophets. This weighs equally for Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Inter-faith dialogue can unlock the power of religious traditions and provide the inspiration, guidance, and validation necessary for populations to move toward non-violent means of conflict resolution. A pluralist and firm believer in consensus and respect for the fellow-man, His Royal Highness Prince Al Hassan bin Tallal of Jordan has been repeatedly pointing out the role of religious leaders in promoting peace and tolerance: “*Inter-faith dialogue has ceased to be luxury, and has become a necessity*”, he says.

Let me recall also the message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II during his papal visit to Bulgaria in 2002, that: *“Every religion is called to promote justice and peace among peoples, forgiveness, life and love”*.

We understand that the Islamic world now expects the OSCE to confront another fast emerging negative phenomenon, namely the attack on Muslims and Arabs, and the incitement against Islam and its followers. It is, indeed, the aim of this Conference – to reaffirm our decisive response against all manifestations of intolerance, racism and discrimination in the OSCE area. Thus, I believe, we have incorporated the legitimate concerns of all Muslims in the OSCE area into our agenda. More over, we shall never forget when condemning anti-Semitism, that the Arabs are a semitic tribe as well.

The shocking images from Bali /Indonesia and recently from Beslan / North Ossetia on our television screens filled us with revulsion and deep sadness as the brutal terrorist act led to the loss of hundreds of innocent lives, including many children. I hope you all will permit me to dedicate this Conference to the families of all those who were killed, injured, or hurt in the terrorist acts in 2004. And I hope you will support me to pass this legacy to the Cordoba Conference in 2005.

Having in mind the particular topic we are discussing today, and its significance for the OSCE future work, I believe I am expressing the prevailing opinion – that we all need the OSCE institutions to be more (even much more) creative in supporting the efforts of the participating states. We expect more initiative on behalf of the field missions as well - in their daily cooperation with the other international organizations represented in the respective countries.

This leads me to the issue of the OSCE transformation – which as you all know is already on our agenda. Risking to repeat myself, I would like to stress my firm belief that the transformation of the OSCE must not be delayed. The Organization can and should be enhanced in order to adapt to the contemporary geopolitical realities. In the last 15 years, the confrontation in the OSCE area, between what was then the Eastern and the Western Europe, has been replaced by the dialogue and cooperation between the countries to the East and to West of the Black Sea. The OSCE should increasingly play the role of a bridge of confidence over the Black Sea. In the run-up to the Sofia Ministerial on 6-7 December, I call once again for stronger political attention in the capitals towards OSCE, in order to agree in Sofia on basic elements of the process of OSCE transformation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that our Conference will foster the dialogue and partnerships towards tolerance, respect and mutual understanding, will deliver a clear and distinctive message on the value of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, the unacceptability of racist, xenophobic and discriminatory actions and attitudes, and will arrive at action-oriented results to combat them.

At the end, I am tempted to paraphrase once more the words of His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew the 1st : *How beautiful is the sight of all of us here today! It is a picture of the possibility for peaceful co-existence throughout all humanity... May this picture and reality be expanded and widened, and may it be accepted by all hearts.*

I wish us all a beneficial discussion.