



## OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2008

Working Sessions 8 and 9: Education and awareness-raising in the promotion  
of human rights  
(3th October 2008)

### EU Statement

Mr./Mrs. moderator,

The European Union attaches great importance to the promotion of human rights education and believes that the OSCE can play an important role in this area. Therefore the EU welcomes the decision to put this topic on the agenda of this year's human dimension implementation meeting. Various frameworks have already been developed at the global level to strengthen human rights education. Nevertheless, the implementation of global declarations at the national and local levels needs to be enforced.

The OSCE commitments in the field of human rights education are numerous, comprehensive and date back to the beginnings of the organization. These are commitments that the EU fully shares, supports and actively advocates also within the Council of Europe. In this regard, we must be coherent and avoid duplication in the work of international organisations. The EU welcomes the existing cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The EU encourages both organisations to enhance and strengthen their cooperation in all fields possible, especially regarding education and awareness-raising in the promotion of human rights.

The OSCE participating States recognized, among others, that it was essential for their citizens to be educated on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The promotion of human rights through education and training can be viewed in the context of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. Human rights education is vital from the viewpoint of strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as of the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. Effective human rights education contributes to combating

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intolerance, religious, racial and ethnic prejudice and hatred, xenophobia and anti-semitism. Therefore the OSCE is performing an important task by paying special attention to tolerance education or rather to education for the promotion of mutual respect and understanding. The participating States have committed themselves to encourage educational programmes that promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and to raise public awareness of the existence and unacceptability of intolerance and discrimination. At this point, I would like to commend the positive results of the pilot project 'our rights', which was launched in 2005 based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The project has been implemented in many OSCE participating States and the evaluation of the project demonstrated a significant increase of children's awareness of their rights. The project has reinforced the educators' capacity to teach about human rights. The EU proposes that the ODIHR continues implementing the project and tries to attract more participating states in further promoting human rights education with special focus on the rights of the child.

The EU fully supports and appreciates the ODIHR's activities in the field of human rights education, such as training for governments and civil society, human-rights training for OSCE field staff, legal training, and education for the promotion of mutual respect and understanding, including education on the holocaust and on anti-semitism. In human rights training and education the focus has also been on enhancing professional capacity of civil society to monitor and report on the situation of human rights. In the Ministerial Council decision 11/05, the ODIHR was assigned to produce a compendium of best practices for the participating States in enhancing the promotion of human rights education and training, including the promotion of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, and nondiscrimination in the OSCE area. The EU is looking forward to the publication of this compendium, which could in future serve as a useful reference for participating States.

The European Union considers it highly appropriate to discuss, at this meeting, best practices of teaching and learning about human rights in schools. The Union is aware that human rights education can be realized in many different ways within formal education, and that it can and should be tailored to fit different educational cultures and systems. To this extent the EU would like to express its commitment to the UN Plan of Action of the World Program for human rights education as adopted in 2005. We call upon all states to implement this plan and further integrate human rights into the primary and secondary school system. Awareness of international human rights instruments and of the principles of international human rights and humanitarian law should be raised. The role of non-state actors and civil society as human rights defenders could also be highlighted as part of enriching the civic curriculum.

Nevertheless, human rights education should not stop at the end of primary or secondary education. It is important to conceive human rights education as a

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lifelong learning process. In order to promote tolerance we need to raise human rights awareness in all generations and in all social strata. This can be achieved only by investing in teacher training and by equipping the teachers at all levels with sufficient skills and knowledge on human rights and minority rights.

The European Union appreciates the opportunity to discuss human rights education of public officials at these two sessions. Public officials' knowledge of and commitment to the human rights of the citizens they serve are an essential part of good governance. The EU believes that specific, tailored human rights training for public officials such as police, prison officers and border guards is essential in strengthening their awareness and capacity to promote and protect human rights. This is especially important with a view to preventing the use of torture and illtreatment in detention places.

The activities of the EU are complementing our common OSCE endeavours. The European Commission, within the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), is funding a series of education and training projects with three main objectives in mind: empowerment of citizens to take action in defence of their human rights., enhancement of the capacity of public officials to protect human rights., and development of networks of expertise in human rights and democracy. It also recognizes that, although training and education projects tend to target a limited number of beneficiaries, these activities have a high impact due to the multiplier effect of initiatives involving the NGOs, schools and universities, which have long-term effects on the development of society.

Furthermore, the European Union attaches great importance to the emerging concept of informal human rights education. It can be disseminated through face-to-face contacts by individuals or groups, or by the media such as the internet, television, radio, advertising, movies or newspapers. Broader groups can be reached and can benefit through informal human rights education especially since informal human rights education reaches out to sectors of society that might otherwise be neglected or not even be aware of their rights. This is crucial in empowering disadvantaged individuals and communities such as elderly people or people excluded from the formal education system.

The European Union would like to highlight the crucial role of the OSCE in reinforcing the capacity of civil society to address the human rights situation throughout the OSCE region. Informal human rights education gives people a chance for grassroots participation, be it through the internet or other media, in support groups, or by learning about the goals of various human rights bodies and becoming involved in them. This gives the public an invaluable chance to examine human rights problems for themselves and form an opinion about them. Civil society, individuals and organizations have a key part to play

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in civic education. We must not forget national human rights institutions which also have a role to play in promoting human rights to a broader audience and we stimulate all national human rights institutions to do so.

In 2008, we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The European Union would like to stress that one of the purposes of this important document is that every individual and every member of society, keeping the declaration constantly in mind, should strive – through teaching and education - to promote respect for these rights and freedoms. Human rights education is thus, clearly, one of the primary purposes of the declaration. This anniversary offers us a unique opportunity for an in-depth evaluation of and reflection about what has been achieved and what are the main challenges ahead of us with respect to human rights education.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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