

**Presentation of the Official Delegation of Bulgaria,
Commission for Protection against Discrimination, at the OSCE High Level Conference on
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Astana, 29-30 June 2010
Session 6**

Dear Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Chair,

Let me first thank to the Kazakh OSCE Chair of Office for this valuable opportunity to participate in the High Level Forum where insights, good practices and effective measures for tackling intolerance and discrimination have been exchanged and future steps are discussed.

Bulgaria is a multi-culture and multi-ethnic country with longstanding traditions of mutual respect and understanding between its ethnic and religious communities. The country is a model for ethnic peace and harmony on the Balkans.

Discrimination is a common phenomenon for every society, even for the most developed and oldest democracies in the world. It takes various forms and can evolve, since it is based on social stereotypes and prejudice. We appreciate the concerted efforts of international community and organizations within the European Union and beyond, especially the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN, who have set the ground for adoption of national antidiscrimination laws and have urged national governments to implement policies promoting tolerance and respect in every field of life.

Bulgaria adopted an Protection against Discrimination Act (2004) covering 19 grounds (race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and providing protection to individuals and legal entities. Under this Law, a national equality body was established in 2005. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) is an independent specialized state body for prevention, protection against discrimination and provision of equal opportunities, having a broad mandate: investigating, considering and pronouncing legally binding decisions on discrimination complaints; providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination, outreach and awareness raising activities informing media, civil society, public authorities, magistrates and law-enforcement bodies on stereotypes and prejudices as roots of discrimination and training main stakeholders in the application of antidiscrimination laws and policies.

CPD functions in accordance with the Paris Principles¹ and General Policy Recommendation No.2 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). Due to its specific competences, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination has been appointed for National Contact Point to the OSCE on hate crimes.

Through CPD case-law, a national practice of proper balance between freedom of expression and respect for the honour and dignity of the different groups in society has been set. Regular workshops for journalists take place, raising their knowledge on tolerance and discrimination issues. Every individual can approach the Commission in case of violation or hate-speech in media or Internet, in order to investigate the misdeed.

¹ Resolution 1992/54 of UN Human Rights Commission

In times of economic crisis which affects worst the vulnerable social groups, such national equality bodies are of crucial importance for the protection of human rights, equal opportunities and social cohesion. Therefore, national governments should provide even stronger support to their equality bodies and allocate them the necessary resources – human and financial, in order to guarantee their actual independence and efficiency.