

**OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING
MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

**Follow-up to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism and
Other Forms of Intolerance**

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**Delivered in the Plenary Session 6: Addressing racist, xenophobic and
discriminatory public discourse spread through, inter alia, the media, Internet,
satellite TV and textbooks, while respecting freedom of expression**

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The freedom of expression represents a fundamental right, any democratic society depending on its existence and recognition. Nevertheless, the exercise of this right implies certain duties and responsibilities, being subject to certain conditions provided by law, so that not to harm others reputation or rights. The limits of freedom of expression shall be exceptive interpreted by analyzing the conditions from case to case, taking into account the effects that the exercise of this right may produce.

We are all aware of the serious effects generated by a racist and discriminatory discourse, especially as regards the influence of perceptions, beliefs or feelings of those who receive such a message. In that context, an important role is played by public personalities, leaders and political parties as well as mass-media. By the influence they have on the public discourse, they can induce both positive and especially negative the public perception.

The internal legislation of Romania contains definite provisions, which sanction the public speech if its content violates human dignity or creates a degrading or offensive environment against a person or community on the ground of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, social category, beliefs, sex or sexual orientation. But, the enforcement of a sanction is not always the solution. Given the position they hold, as opinion-makers, mass-media and public personalities must create their own self-control mechanisms, and the society must isolate and eliminate such manifestations.

These standards must be also applied to other means of communication, such as the internet, which represents a widespread mean of information, with direct and powerful effects sometimes bigger than written media or audiovisual.

Taking into account these considerations and my professional experience I would like to mention three practical and necessary approaches on preventing and combating public discourse with racist, xenophobic and discriminatory character.

1- Monitoring the public discourse with racist and discriminatory character

The monitoring and investigation of the discriminatory manifestations within the public discourse and mass-media is a practical instrument in combating or fighting against them. The institution I represent (National Council for Combating Discrimination) uses these kind of analyzes for several years and the measures we took in these situations had positive effects

(for instance, there was ascertained a decreasing of acts or deeds of discrimination in the field of advertisement or press articles with a discriminatory character).

2 - The facilitation of free access to information

One of the most important approaches of combating racism, discrimination and intolerance is the free change of ideas and information. This implies also public free access to information regarding these negative phenomena within society, to legal and administrative means of preventing and combating racism, discrimination and intolerance. At this point, the important role of public institutions and authorities interferes in order to collect and publish these kind of information and to assure free access to information that have a public character.

3 - Promoting tolerance and a non-discriminatory language by mass-media

Media and press trusts, television and radio societies, especially the public ones, play an important role in promoting tolerance and a non-discriminatory language. They have a moral and mostly a social duty to contribute at preventing and combating racist, xenophobic, intolerant or discriminatory attitudes and language. This fact can be achieved by different means, such as promoting a culture of tolerance and also understanding the negative impact/effect of racism and discrimination within society, promoting diversity and cultural values of certain communities within society, reporting with impartiality acts or facts of racism and discrimination as well as the avoidance of unwanted terms on the ground of racial, ethnic, sexual, religious or similar criteria, that can create or induce stereotypes. All these facts can be achieved by means of conception and implementation of certain conduct and deontological codes specific for these areas, which must include references to the above mentioned means.

At the end, I would like to express my hope that by means of collaboration of all the concerned actors (public institutions, political leaders and opinion-makers, professional organizations of journalists from written media and audiovisual) we will succeed to eliminate these negative phenomenon and to build a society that provides a reasonable balance between freedom of expression and combating the racist, xenophobic, intolerant or discriminatory discourse.

Thank you for your attention.