

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



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Presentation

by

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OSCE-CONFERENCE ON RACISM

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First let me thank the OSCE and its Member States for giving me the opportunity to make an introduction at this conference. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), as part of a comprehensive EU approach, has been developing its cooperation on issues of racism and related phenomena with the OSCE. It therefore welcomes this conference as an occasion to demonstrate publicly its commitment to enhancing this cooperation further.

I sincerely hope that this conference will establish a forward looking agenda and send a signal that diversity is a reality and a positive factor driving all our societies into the future. And in order to progress we need coalitions, partnerships between governments, civil society and between international organisations. We all need to believe that by realising the full potential of all the members of our society we benefit everyone in society.

Barriers such as racism, discrimination and related intolerance prevent that from happening. All the good words we shall say here will be quickly forgotten if we leave this conference and fail to back up our words with action. We therefore need to outline in this session practical activities that we can monitor, evaluate and develop further. Our aim should be to turn words into action.

Our aim must also be to ensure that we develop an inclusive and holistic approach to tackling racism and its related phenomena. Our goal should be to forge a coalition against racism, not identify a hierarchy of victims. Our work should at all times be inclusive of all groups of victims or targets of racism. In this light, anti-Semitism, islamophobia and related phenomena must be an integral component of a common approach. We have to see the differences but all these forms of racism have more in common than in what separates them.

It is imperative that the OSCE and its participating states are clear and unequivocal about their values. The values of an organisation direct the manner it tackles the challenges that it is faced with.

These values must be based on the universality of human rights, and these rights must be enabled at the national level and for all members of society. Cooperation with civil society and target groups representing minorities cannot be effective unless there is confidence that these rights will be respected and enabled. Cooperation with civil society also requires that civil society expertise and knowledge forms a source for developing policy and practice. The EU experience is that action either fails or is less effective where only lip service is paid to civil society. We need broad coalitions between governments, social partners, NGOs, the media and private foundations in order to have effective change. A common approach, but addressing different target groups is the most effective tool to influence the public debate and attitudes. Every organisation has its own responsibility to address racism in its field of competence: politics, economics, social area, education, culture, media.

I am pleased to see that the media and the use of internet will be addressed at this conference. Both can create pictures which are sometimes more influential than words.

Respect for diversity is a central factor in bringing together various members of our communities to work together. We have many examples of the success of this approach in dealing with intercultural tension, improving the understanding between communities, making social and public services more accessible to all members of a local community and combating social exclusion. The EUMC has organised round tables in local communities and worked with local authorities - the feedback is consistent. Members of minority ethnic groups have appreciated the opportunity to be listened to on matters that impact on them as members of local communities. They have welcomed the opportunity to counter the stereotypes or negative perceptions that they sometimes faced.

Even where they disagree with members of other minority communities and amongst themselves, they have all agreed that having the forum to discuss and communicate their ideas and feelings was important and helpful. A common approach is a part of the success story.

As we have said previously, the European Union was created out of the ashes of the Second World War. It has the experience of the destruction to its societies of a war fed on ethnic hatred and aggressive nationalism.

We have to learn from the past and to give cultural, religious and ethnic diversity recognition, dignity and respect: these are basic elements on which the EU had been established. – The EU is the answer to the Shoa. Never forget: the EU is a unique peace project. And the miracle happened: former enemies became friends – France and Germany.

In the EU we are developing a comprehensive architecture to combat racism – legislation, institutional mechanisms and a variety of programmes and projects that draw in civil society, transfer knowledge and experience, amongst and between governments and civil society, and raise awareness and build capacity.

Through the European Parliament we also have the added benefit of democratic scrutiny and input into our activities. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia is a pillar of the EU's architecture to combat racism.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia is an independent body of the European Union.

It has the main objective of collecting data and information on racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and related intolerance for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of EU action against these phenomena.

The EUMC has established an information network, RAXEN, to collect data on the situation of racism and racial discrimination at the national level in the EU Member states. This network which is built around organisations based in each EU member state collects data and information from a variety of sources such as non-governmental organisations, specialised bodies, academic institutions and governments and can react as a rapid response facility to sudden and dramatic events such as the terrorist attack of 11 September.

The EUMC cooperates with international organisations to ensure consistency and coherence to action at the European level and to avoid duplication of activities. This is crucial as many bodies already exist which combat racism at the international level. A concrete example of our cooperation is the work with the OSCE on a conference to address barriers to Roma women accessing public health care.

Another example is our regular meeting with the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to share information related to future work. Such cooperation is important because it ensures that information is shared, action is complemented and duplication is avoided.

The EUMC carries out studies and research which can be on subjects which address future possible issues or specific issues which fill gaps in information. It hosts round table events at the European level. The EUMC has a database which is available to the public through our website and we also undertake awareness raising activities with a variety of actors such as the media.

The importance of the work of bodies at the national level combating racism and racial discrimination is recognised by the EU. The EU's Racial Equality directive calls on its member states to designate such bodies. These bodies should have the competence to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination, conduct independent surveys and publish independent reports and make recommendations on issues related to racial discrimination.

As these bodies are established in the EU it is important that a mechanism is established that enables them to communicate with one another and share their experience, expertise and good practice. The EUMC plans to approach the EU bodies with a view to facilitating such cooperation. This cooperation can in turn be extended to similar bodies in other states in the OSCE region.

I hope that taken together you will see that the EUMC plans to follow up this intervention with concrete proposals for closer cooperation with the OSCE. This cooperation will involve the participation of civil society and independent specialised bodies more closely in our activities. It demonstrates what I hope will also be one of the key results of this conference closer co-operation and greater sharing of information between the EUMC and the OSCE institutions.

I have therefore a set of recommendations for follow up work:

Recommendations:

1. OSCE states need to develop ways to collect data on racism in a more systematic and comprehensive way using a common set of indicators and benchmarks. These indicators can be developed in cooperation with other organisations such as the EU and Council of Europe.
2. Cooperation between independent specialised bodies and inter-governmental organisations combating racism at the national level should be enhanced and the OSCE, in cooperation with the EUMC and the Council of Europe, should be encouraged to facilitate meetings of such bodies and organisations.

3. Raising awareness in civil society: Each group of civil society should address racism and discrimination in its own field: political groups, social partners, religious communities, NGOs, media.
4. Cooperation between inter-governmental organisations, governments and civil society should be strengthened, particularly in planning and developing action at the local level.
5. And: political leadership to address the civil society is one of the most important tools. We know that racism is declining when the political leadership is clear in the fight against racism and for diversity.

Forty years ago in Washington DC, a black religious and civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, fighting for equality and respect for African Americans, presented to the world his dream of an equal, just and tolerant society. It is still a dream that we all share. It is also our dream that through a common will and action we can all finally make a reality. Thank you.