



Tolerance Implementation Meeting

**Education to promote mutual respect and
understanding and to teach about the Holocaust**

Dubrovnik, 23-24 October 2006

*Opening remarks by Pierre Chevalier, Special Envoy of the OSCE
Chairman-in-Office*

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure of welcoming you to the OSCE's second Tolerance Implementation Meeting. In our debates on tolerance of the past few years, time and again education and youth have come forward as key elements in our efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding. Indeed, education is seen by most actors as the most efficient long term instrument for promoting tolerance. In June, when Chairman-in-Office De GUCHT handed the OSCE's contribution to the Alliance of Civilizations to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the OSCE explicitly recalled the importance of producing and disseminating educational materials that teach about diverse faiths and cultures and about the diversity within cultures and religions. I am therefore very pleased that during this two-day conference we will be tackling these issues at an expert level, and with a clear focus on implementation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, both history and the present teach us that diversity often also leads to misunderstandings, intolerance or sometimes outright hostility or even genocide. Lest we forget, the terrible tragedy of the Holocaust is there to remind us of the horrors that can be caused by intolerance. The city of Dubrovnik, indeed the region as a whole, in spite of tremendous efforts from many actors to reestablish a multicultural society, still bears the scars of a recent conflict, and not that long ago was a symbol for some of the extremes that intolerance can lead to.

While it is essential to remember, and to address both causes and symptoms of intolerance, it is also crucially important to look for solutions. In identifying best practices, tools and methods to teach about tolerance and understanding, this meeting adopts a positive approach.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the context of a conference on education, you will forgive me if I come across as somewhat pedantic though I should add that that is not at all my habit! But it is Monday morning and many are back in the classroom after the weekend. From my days at university, I remember that the word Balkanization means different things: indeed, in political discourse the term has come to emphasize fragmentation, while its linguistic sense is exactly the opposite: it calls up the shared features that unite the Balkan languages despite their diverse origins. In linguistics, the term refers to the result of

extensive mutual influence between distinct branches of the Indo-European language family: Slavic, Albanian, Hellenic, Romanian and Romany. That process has resulted in common grammatical features that are cross-fertilized among distinct language families, due to geographical proximity and extensive contacts, rather than due to membership in the same language family.

I use this example to emphasize that diversity is a positive force. Indeed in some circles, at the insistence of some groups and parties, pressure is building to negate the intrinsically positive and enriching aspects of diversity. That is clearly NOT the way forward.

I also use this example to illustrate the positive impact of extensive contacts: out of diversity, shared characteristics can come, a common understanding can grow. Diversity and unity can go hand in hand.

Finally, building on such positive elements, identifying a positive agenda, has been a central element in the OSCE's efforts in the field of tolerance this year. The basis for our common action - democratic institutions and the respect for fundamental freedoms - is already there. It is up to us to identify how to continue building on this basis towards more respect and understanding.

A second characteristic of our work this year has been the emphasis on implementation. Indeed, we are here to confirm that we are not only concerned about acts of intolerance, but also capable of addressing these challenges. In Ljubljana, Ministers decided that our Organization should

concentrate efforts in 2006 on implementing the many commitments that have been made over the past few years, that the time had come to focus our energy on tangible initiatives in cooperation with academia, faith-based organizations, educational institutions, cultural movements and diverse civil society representatives.

This is exactly what we have done. The first implementation meeting was held in June in Almaty. The second one starts today. In Vienna in November, the ODIHR will host a third implementation meeting, gathering the national contact points on hate crimes. Finally, during the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, which ended only a week ago, a special day was devoted to reviewing the implementation of participating States' commitments on promoting tolerance and understanding.

In this work, we are fortunate to be able to rely on the extensive involvement of many actors within the OSCE, in the first place some of the key actors in the Human Dimension: the ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office for combating intolerance and discrimination. We rely on these respective actors to tell us more about their initiatives in the course of the meeting. Suffice it to say at this point that diverse OSCE actors have launched an array of multidisciplinary initiatives, which indicate that the OSCE is uniquely qualified to host this meeting. We are indeed a multidimensional organisation with a range of tools, ranging from political agreements to special institutions, monitoring instruments and technical assistance programmes. We have at our disposal expertise and experience in areas that are at the core of our discussions today: human

rights, democratisation, a free and responsible media, minority rights et cetera. I call on you to make use of all these instruments and expertise to achieve our goal.

Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is an expert meeting, so let us be frank with one another and learn from our experiences, good and bad ones. The outcome of this meeting should be reflected in an OSCE Ministerial Decision on Tolerance. We want to hear from you what should be in it, for the Ministerial Decision will guide our action for the year to come. On that note, it is my understanding that the incoming Spanish Chairmanship will propose the central theme of “Diversity and participation in pluralistic societies”. We will of course gladly support our Spanish colleagues in their endeavours.

The sessions of our meeting cover a range of issues related to education. The first session, on curricula, teacher-training and strategies to combat prejudice, hatred and discrimination focuses on formal education. The second session, on teaching tools, underscores the salience of exchanging best practices. We look forward to presentations by ODIHR of its assessment report with recommendations to States and an overview of different approaches of OSCE States to diversity education, as well as to the teaching material on anti-Semitism that the ODIHR will present in these first two sessions.

The third session addresses the issues of teaching about the Holocaust. You will recall that during a ceremony in Brussels in January, the Chairmanship

commemorated the Holocaust. On the same day, the Guidelines for guidelines for educators when preparing Holocaust memorial days, a joint project by ODIHR and Yad Vashem, were launched. In my view, Holocaust education remains one of the most advanced forms of education to promote mutual respect and understanding.

The fourth session takes us beyond the classroom, as diversity education and the prevention of hate motivated bullying and intercultural tensions also means educating parents and teachers, also means working via youth fora, youth organizations, sports and cultural partnerships.

The fifth and final session looks ahead and examines how the OSCE's works in strengthening existing educational programmes and initiatives to promote respect and understanding could be further developed. It will also be an opportunity to look beyond our Organization, to the important work that is done by other organisations.

We are very proud to have initiated in Almaty a tradition of preparatory NGO meetings, with a prominent speaking slot for a representative from civil society in the opening session to tell us about the recommendations made at that meeting. This will again be the case today, as one of our first speakers is the Chairman of yesterday's proceedings at the NGO meeting.

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our gratitude goes to the government of Croatia for hosting and co-organizing this meeting, and for deciding to host it here in the magnificent city of Dubrovnik. I also thank the ODIHR for its substantial input, its many helpful comments and proposals. The OSCE participating States I thank for their support for and due recognition for this meeting.

We are all members of the OSCE family because we share the same values: we are resolved to promote a climate of confidence, of respect and understanding within and among societies. These values are the essence, the backbone of our Organization. It must be a major part of our task, indeed a duty, to pass on these values to future generations. How to achieve this is the substance of our work today and tomorrow.

Thank you.