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## Irish Presidency of the European Union

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### **OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism Session 3: The Role of Education**

One month ago at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Human Rights Education and Training, the European Union made clear its attachment to the role of education in combating intolerance. This role comprises not only the formal study of history, civic, religious and other education, but also the training of public officials and the use of informal education.

In formal education, history offers an invaluable opportunity to teach students about the most egregious of human rights violations. To ensure that the history and message of the Holocaust is properly and effectively conveyed, it is necessary to provide teaching materials that focus on the facts, as well as history teachers who are aware of the research that informs these materials. Sanitised history serves neither the interest of the pupil nor of society. While the European Union believes it vital to affirm and support the crucial role of history in educational curricula, we should not, however, neglect studies of the present. Confronting the past and exploring the present is the key to building a future of inclusiveness and tolerance. In a modern and multicultural Europe, formal education should also proactively promote tolerance and a community of values that recognises fully the human rights of all people, while instilling respect for the diversity of culture, race, opinion and belief on our Continent and beyond.

Quality education to tackle anti-Semitism requires quality teaching. The European Union believes that the means to improve teaching and training on racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and discrimination should be emphasised. This could be

achieved by introducing at training colleges a compulsory component to raise awareness, understanding and respect of the various cultures, religions and traditions in the OSCE region.

Similarly, training for public officials, including police officers, is essential to strengthen their capacity to act to combat anti-Semitism. Such training on racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and discrimination needs to be targeted to policy makers and service providers simultaneously. For the latter, intolerance awareness should be mainstreamed into the training they receive. In addition, elected government officials should be offered the opportunity to take the same training as their public servants.

The European Union attaches great importance to the emerging concept of informal human rights education as a tool in the fight against anti-Semitism. Informal education includes inter alia peer-to-peer education, awareness-raising by civil society groups, as well as government-promoted education outside a formal setting. Many more people than can be reached through education in schools can benefit from such education. However, the possibility does exist to misuse some tools of education, such as the internet and other media, to pursue goals which run contrary to the fight against anti-Semitism, to spread misinformation, or even to foment hatred under the guise of promoting awareness. It is necessary to keep in mind these potential problems and explore options to minimise their impact, within the framework of the freedom of speech and opinion. To this end we look forward to the Special Meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes, to be held in Paris in June.

The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia and the Associated Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this statement.

