



**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia, and Hate Crimes through
Educational and Awareness-Raising Initiatives**

**Opening Remarks by Ambassador Renatas Norkus
Chairperson of the Permanent Council
Vienna, 10 November 2011**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship, to the third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia and Hate Crimes through Educational and Awareness-Raising Initiatives.

OSCE participating States have acknowledged that racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance constitute a threat to stability and security throughout the OSCE region. Thus a comprehensive range of commitments have been adopted to promote mutual respect and understanding and to prevent manifestations of racism and xenophobia. However, ODIHR's annual report *Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region – Incidents and Responses*

shows that racism, xenophobia still threaten the security of individuals and social cohesion across the OSCE region.

Combating intolerance and discrimination, especially through educational and awareness-raising measures, as well as freedom of expression and media are among the top priorities of the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship for this year.

Together with the ODIHR we have organized three high-level conferences on tolerance and non-discrimination this year: in March, we held a conference in Prague on confronting anti-Semitism in public discourse; in September in Rome, we organized an event on preventing and responding to hate incidents and crimes against Christians; and just two weeks ago here in Vienna, we held a conference devoted to countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse.

The strong interest shown in the 3 High Level meetings by the participating States and by civil society representatives reflects the importance of this topic for our Organization. Sharing experience and identifying best practices are the necessary steps to address these issues in line with the commitments we have undertaken.

As a *follow-up* to these important events, the Lithuanian Chairmanship intends to engage in building consensus on updating the OSCE political commitments in the field of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, notably by adopting a Ministerial Council decision on **Countering Manifestations of Intolerance in Public Discourse**. In our view this decision could base on the recommendations of the 3 High Level meetings on this topic.

The Chairmanship is also pleased to see that other parts of the OSCE family have also devoted attention to promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. In May, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly recognized 2011 as the *International Year for People of African Descent*. The Resolution (AS (11) Res 17 E) reaffirms the responsibility of parliamentarians to speak out against intolerance and discrimination and to raise awareness of the value of diversity.

To be more effective, prevention of and responses to racism and xenophobia need to be focused and concrete. We must step up efforts throughout the OSCE area to address all manifestations of intolerance, and in particular hate crimes, in a timely and robust fashion. If we fail in this effort, intolerance has the potential to degenerate into conflict.

Education and awareness raising initiatives are particularly powerful tools in combating racism and intolerance. It can prevent escalation and promote mutual respect and understanding. Actions in this field need to foster an appreciation of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Initiatives to combat racism and xenophobia are more effective if a broad range of actors, including public officials at a national and local level, civil society, church and religious leaders, sports or music celebrities are involved in the process. While a number of participating States have undertaken numerous efforts in this field, longer-term and more coherent approaches are needed if there is to be a real impact.

It is my hope that today's meeting will provide a good opportunity to take stock of progress in this area, share best practices and generate ideas for making concrete progress in addressing remaining challenges.

I wish to thank the ODIHR Director ambassador J. Lenarčič and his team for having prepared this meeting.

I thank you for your attention and wish you every success in your discussions.