

**CONTRIBUTION BY THE SLOVENIAN DELEGATION AT THE OSCE  
CONFERENCE ON RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION  
VIENNA, 4 AND 5 SEPTEMBER 2003**

**Session: The Role of Governments and Civil Society in Promoting Tolerance**

The OSCE – an international organisation with a broad geographic and diverse ethnic background whose basic aim is to prevent conflicts – is undoubtedly the right place for a discussion on the pressing issues experienced by modern societies.

Due to the recent developments in the world that cause concern, international organisations have become even more aware that the fight against all forms of racism and intolerance is crucial for the future of the world, and that all capacities available must be united in this fight. It is therefore in no way duplication, if these issues are simultaneously dealt with by the UN, EU, Council of Europe and other organisations; it is rather a concentration of efforts and concepts leading to the same goal. A stronger involvement, unity and, above all, cooperation between international factors and their member states can assist and encourage individual governments to save no efforts when confronting phenomena that in any way undermine the vital essence of coexistence between people.

Silence and failure to react have proven devastating in all historical challenges to date and no regard has been shown by the violators for this inaction.

The findings of a recent EU survey are very encouraging. This survey shows that 80 per cent of European citizens are against any discrimination on the basis of race, religion or ethnic origin. Nevertheless, racism and discrimination do occur in innumerable forms, and their imagination is inexhaustible, feeding on prosaic everyday life and seasoned by fear, hatred and prejudices. Unfortunately these negative forces consistently and persistently follow modern societies, exploiting to their own advantage society's intellectual and technical progress. They can assume countless forms that are sometimes difficult to designate even though they have a recognisable common denominator: the attack on human dignity, which the European Charter of Fundamental Rights justifiably places as first of all the rights and freedoms.

The delegation of the Republic of Slovenia therefore joins all those who welcome the idea on cooperation and on taking stock of initiatives and developing actions for sharing good practices between participating countries. We believe that such activities should be consolidated in the joint action by the EU, Council of Europe and the OSCE. We also welcome the EU concept of "For Diversity, against Discrimination", aimed at conveying positive messages on diversities, which should raise the awareness of societies.

Legal regulation is certainly an important factor at the national level, but coordinated activities of government and civil society – as the two best organised and qualified factors – are of equal, if not greater, importance. These two factors also attract most attention by the media and have the most resources and possibilities for carrying out their strategies.

Several years ago, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia set up the Equal Opportunities Office and is presently considering the establishment of a national institution for human rights, which would include a strong component of civil society that would further reinforce the institution's activities.

The present conference is also interesting since it provides contributions by non-governmental organisations, thus giving a good insight into the situation and a cross-section of developments in the broader OSCE region. As in other regions, the countries in this region, too, seek appropriate and concrete methods of limiting, as much as possible, phenomena of racism and discrimination.

Slovenia, a co-sponsor of the two-year resolution on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the UN General Assembly Third Committee, welcomes the organisation of the OHCHR seminar against racism and intolerance in Prague, which, following the Durban conference, should launch ideas on the continuation of concerted action at national levels.

When endeavouring to establish a fair and inclusive society, one should not forget about the important contribution by individuals – not only those who are known, visible and covered by the media, but also all who, through their everyday work and commitment, far from the public eye, are paving the way to a society that does not exclude anybody.

Let me mention such an example: ECRI (the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) of the Council of Europe will organise a round table in October as a follow-up to the adopted second report on Slovenia. The participation of three sides on an equal footing is envisaged: representatives of the government; non-governmental organisations (including the contribution by representatives of ethnic groups residing in Slovenia and of the five most important religious communities in Slovenia); as well as individuals from the field who represent just themselves and their work: a kindergarten teacher, representative of the majority nation, who has been working with Romany children in a small town for several years; a doctor who came to Slovenia from Bosnia and was twice chosen as "doctor of the year"; an enterprising young girl who has been studying Romany culture and advocates the rights of Roma in the environment in which she lives; and an expert who with local mayors systematically discusses the issue of how to check the phenomena of discrimination and racism. Experience shows that people are most willing to believe those from their own everyday environment, whom they consider to be their equals and with whom they can compare themselves.

In recent weeks, the leading Slovenian daily has been publishing in its Saturday supplement interesting reflections of some foreigners who are linked to our country either personally or through their work and who live there. The other's difference can most authentically reflect one's own identity; moreover, knowledge of the other's difference and his/her identity may help in establishing a distance towards one's own self and one's own identity.

In this connection let me quote the words by Claudio Magris, an author, historian and "traveller across borders", born in a multiethnic region nearby. His words are very topical and reveal the broader connotation of borders in the life of an individual, state, nation or ethnic group: "Border lines are lines crossing and intersecting the body, marking it as healed wounds or wrinkles by which one distinguishes oneself not only from one's neighbour, but also from one's own self." (Translated from the French original).

The Republic of Slovenia firmly supports the conclusions and recommendations of the Conference and joins all those who believe that these should, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the June Conference on Antisemitism, be appropriately reflected in ministerial reports.