

OPENING SPEECH

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BULGARIA AND CHAIRMAN IN OFFICE OF THE OSCE, AT THE OSCE
MEETING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACIST, XENOPHOBIC
AND ANTI - SEMITIC PROPAGANDA ON THE INTERNET AND HATE
CRIMES**

Paris, 16 – 17 June 2004

**Monsieur le Ministre,
Votre Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,**

C'est un plaisir pour moi d'être à Paris pour cette importante conférence sur la relation entre la propagande raciste, xénophobe et antisémite sur internet et les crimes inspirés par la haine. En tant que pays leader dans les technologies de pointe, la France est bien placée pour être l'hôte de cette Réunion. Je voudrais tout d'abord remercier le Gouvernement français et le Ministre des Affaires étrangères, M. Michel Barnier, d'avoir organisé cet événement.

[I am pleased to be in Paris for this important meeting on the relationship between racist, xenophobia and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes. As a leading nation in advanced technologies France is well - placed to be the host of this Meeting. I would like to thank the Government of France and minister Michel Barnier for hosting and organizing this event.]

This is the second in a series of three OSCE meetings this year that focus on tolerance and anti-discrimination. A few weeks ago in Berlin we had a high-profile conference on anti-Semitism. We look forward to a conference in Brussels on tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination in September.

Today and tomorrow we will be looking at an issue that is all too relevant in the contemporary world: hatred in cyberspace. The Internet is a revolutionary form of communication that has transformed our world. The very nature of the Internet calls for solutions at the international level.

The question is what the answer of the international community should be? We have to look at both the medium and the message. After all, we must not limit the freedom of expression and the freedom of the media, which are vital to democracy. We have to be careful not to over-regulate the incredible virtual diversity provided by the Internet, or limit the free exchange of ideas and information. And yet, we must not let its openness be abused by those individuals who use it to spread hatred.

The objective of this Meeting is to bring together governments, international organizations, civil society and the Internet industry to discuss this pertinent contemporary issue. I am glad that so many representatives, coming not only from the ranks of civil society, but also from the industry circles are present here. I hope that this Meeting will provide an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between governments, industry and NGOs at both the national and the international level.

Relevant international standards have already been developed in this field and should be the basis for our discussions on racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic speech. The application of such standards must be flexible enough to respect different approaches, but strong enough to effectively combat hate crimes.

The best approach is self-regulation or co-regulation, through developing codes of conduct, and through increasing users' and providers' awareness and sensitivity to the problem. But we cannot leave the job to the providers alone. They should be supported by clear guidelines from governments and clear legislation, if appropriate.

As an organisation comprised of 55 states, including some of the most highly industrialized and technologically advanced countries in the world, the OSCE is well-positioned to develop a coordinated approach. We share a deep commitment to the core OSCE principles, including freedom of speech and freedom of expression. But we also have to acknowledge that these freedoms do not include an unrestricted right to spread hatred, lies and abuse, which could harm people and even destabilize our societies. This was manifested in the Maastricht Ministerial Council decision and in the OSCE Permanent Council decision on Combating Anti-Semitism.

I believe that the OSCE Participating States should make it clear, that they are serious about tackling hate speech on the Internet. They should undertake measures to strengthen international cooperation and mutual assistance between law enforcement authorities throughout the OSCE region in order to ensure that effective action can be taken against the dissemination of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic material via the Internet. Such measures should include training of law enforcement authorities on their role in combating hate crimes and in preventing the dissemination of racist and xenophobic material via the Internet. Different countries have sought different approaches to combat hate crimes on the Internet. Let me draw your attention to the data provided by participating states following a questionnaire launched by the CiO of the OSCE.

The OSCE should increase its efforts to reach young people in order to improve their understanding of the need for tolerance. The Internet is the ideal forum for such activities given the unrestricted access to human rights information it offers. The Internet also provides an opportunity for international dialogue and discussion and can therefore serve as an invaluable tool for cultivating a culture of tolerance and understanding.

There are many examples of how this can be successful. During the Anti-Semitism Conference in Berlin, good practices in ways of teaching about the Holocaust and in discouraging anti-Semitism were also highlighted. This Meeting will provide an opportunity to exchange views and learn from such good practices.

To conclude, the Internet is about choice. Let us try to ensure that all of us can benefit from the free flow of information and ideas provided by the Internet and yet limit the impact of those who use cyberspace as a tool to spread hatred and intolerance.

I hope an appropriate follow-up to this meeting could be decided upon as a result of the two-day deliberations.

I wish the OSCE Paris meeting fruitful proceedings and a positive outcome.

Thank you for your attention!