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**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Hate Crimes**  
*4-5 May 2009*

**Opening Remarks by the Chairperson of the Permanent Council,  
Ambassador Mara Marinaki**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of 2009, focusing on combating Hate Crime and particularly on the effective implementation of relevant legislation.

Hate crime has often been characterized as “the violence of intolerance and prejudice”. It certainly represents a real threat to democratic societies, which value tolerance, non-discrimination and the respect for diversity, as it puts a strain on their unity and cohesion.

The first acknowledgement of the significance of legislation in fighting hate crime in the OSCE was back in 2003, at the Maastricht Ministerial Council Meeting. Ministerial Council Decisions adopted in 2006 and 2007 have revisited the issue.

Of course combating hate crime has been part of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination agenda of the OSCE. ODIHR has been systematically presenting its valuable annual reports, providing assistance and support to participating States and organizing relevant events.

Recently we saw the launching of ODIHR’s practical guide, a very illuminating publication that clarifies all the basic aspects of hate crime laws and can prove a valuable tool to lawmakers in the OSCE area. The timing of this launching was ideal, as it should prove very useful in the deliberations of our meeting.

The Greek Chairmanship has been convinced that it is time to bring, once again, and in a more focused way, the issue to the forefront and discuss it in one of the main Human Dimension meetings of the year.

Apart from the time that has elapsed without a more focused discussion, an important incentive for addressing the issue at this juncture is a reported increase in the violent incidents, across the OSCE region, that could fall within the category of hate crimes. The current economic crisis is possibly one exacerbating factor for this distressing trend.

This trend has been pointed out not only by the ODIHR, but by various organizations, including NGOs, who are well placed to form an overview of the situation and make pertinent recommendations. Indeed the role, as well as the responsibility of the civil society in this connection is very important.

Of course, legislation is one of the various means of combating hate crimes and its role is the main focus of the meeting. Data collection and the interaction between all stakeholders (participating States, international organizations and civil society) is also essential to achieving progress. In this connection, the Chairmanship is committed to co-sponsoring the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the National Contact Points for hate crimes later in the year, in cooperation with and under the aegis of ODIHR.

I would like to welcome the Personal Representative of the CiO on combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andy Baker and thank him, along with ODIHR, for a very relevant event held last March here in Vienna. The Chairmanship considers that the involvement of the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson in Office for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination shall help all of us shed light on some of the main aspects of the problem and I am certain of their commitment to contributing to the follow-up to this meeting, in their respective fields.

The Chairmanship believes that conditions are right to try to identify the key aspects of the problem, raise awareness and seek effective, workable solutions. Let me thank you Janez [Lenarcic] and ODIHR for the invaluable input and wish everyone a fruitful discussion that will bear tangible results.

Thank you.