



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretary General

Bucharest, 7 June 2007

**OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and
Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding**

**Opening Remarks by
OSCE Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut**

Thank you Chairman.
Your Highness,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have been touched and inspired by President Basescu and by Prince Hassan bin Talal and Elie Wiesel. I will therefore be brief.

Allow me to thank the Romanian authorities for the organization of this event, and to thank also the Chairman-in-Office for the personal leadership he has provided on the central issues of combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

These are key questions, because the security of our States can only be built on respect for the security of each individual citizen and this is a face of the wise security Prince Hassan just referred to. Our modern societies are complex, multi-cultural structures involved in globalization, but with yet deep geographic and cultural roots. We therefore share across the OSCE area, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, the challenge of integrating diversity into healthy societies and legitimate policies.

Ignorance, hate speech, discrimination of all sorts, marginalization, and obstacles to integration can rip the fibres of our delicately inter-woven communities. This can lead to the anger and resentment that breeds hate and even violence. This can lead also to the greatest losses of all – the loss of our histories of tolerance, the loss of the richness of our diversity, and the loss of the potential this holds out for future generations.

Integrating diversity while strengthening our common values is one of the most important tasks in the implementation of the values that bind OSCE participating States. The stakes are high; our thinking and our action must be equally so.

The OSCE has been active since its inception.

Our starting point is the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and its emphasis on promoting the ‘inherent dignity of the individual.’ It is worth returning to the Final Act itself, which prescribes participating States to ‘recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience.’

On this foundation of ensuring respect for the human rights and the fundamental freedoms of the individual, the OSCE has since built, bit by bit, a strategy to foster greater stability within states and to deepen security between them.

The OSCE angle is wide. The Organization’s three institutions -- the ODIHR, HCNM and RFoM -- along with its 19 field operations, together with the three Personal Representatives, act jointly to support participating States in implementing their commitments in the Human Dimension -- specifically, in overcoming intolerance, discrimination and in fostering mutual respect and understanding.

The OSCE acts at four levels.

- First, by providing a political forum where 56 countries with different cultures, religions and histories come together to clarify and define amongst themselves the ‘first principles’ in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination. This is no easy task, and this explains the visibility given to the issue across the fifty six States through Conferences such as this one.

- Second, by helping to build capacity in participating States to implement the commitments they have agreed to in the Human Dimension, specifically with regard to tolerance and non-discrimination. In practice, this translates into the multiple capacity-building projects undertaken by the Organization and its Institutions with state institutions, legislatures, educational systems, and civil society groups.
- Third, by monitoring and reporting on the situation in participating States with regard to tolerance and non-discrimination. The OSCE acts through peer review and monitoring by the Organization, its Institutions and Field Operations. By the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office, it acts to keep States on moving towards the implementation of OSCE standards and commitments on a long and demanding path.
- Finally, by acting as a regional platform for the implementation of initiatives developed at the international level on issues relevant to tolerance and non-discrimination. I draw your attention here to the important OSCE contribution last year to the UN Initiative on the Alliance of Civilisations. The OSCE Report argued that the Organization and its States are, given their composition and goals, already very much an ‘alliance of civilisations in action.’

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE sees combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding, inter-cultural and religious dialogue as core to the conflict prevention and crisis management activities in the twenty-first century. Your debates should be a major stepping stone in this process.

I look forward to our discussions.