

## **Tolerance is a key ingredient of democracy**

*By Ambassador Maurizio Massari. Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro*

Since 1996 the General Assembly of the United Nations has invited member states to annually observe the 16 November as the Day of International Tolerance. In this respect, on behalf of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro, I take this opportunity to wish the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro a happy tolerance day, today, tomorrow and for the coming 365 days.

The promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination is key to the OSCE human dimension commitments. Full respect for the principle of tolerance, as outlined at the Istanbul summit (1999), the Charter of Paris and other OSCE documents, is central to the promotion of dignity, human rights, freedom of thought and expression. In essence tolerance can be simply expressed as respect, responsibility and rights. As outlined in article 1.4 of the UN *Declaration of Principles of Tolerance* "tolerance means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accept that others adhere to theirs." Of course this refers to tolerance at the personal or inter-personal level. At the state level, tolerance must also be enshrined through legislation, international commitments, conventions and through social justice.

Ultimately tolerance is a key ingredient of democracy. It implies acceptance and respect of diversity, pluralism and openness. Democratic societies are by definition "open societies" and "tolerant societies". President of Serbia and Montenegro Marovic this week exemplified this open and tolerant approach specific to democratic societies, when he apologised to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina for wrong doings carried out in the 1990's. Conversely, intolerance is a recipe for authoritarianism and an undemocratic policy. In fact, with intolerance even electoral democracies risk to become illiberal. Tolerance, therefore, needs to be the point of reference and convergence for both civil society in all its components and for all political forces. In simple terms, tolerance is the precondition for any constitutional democracy to work. Today, constitutional, liberal Europe is based on values such as tolerance, cultural, ethnic and political pluralism and acceptance of diversity. Europe is ready to accept all countries - including Serbia and Montenegro - that fully embrace these same values.

In the past two and a half years the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro, through a range of programmes, has steadfastly supported a tolerance-based approach to democracy. In this regard the OSCE assisted in the drafting of the Charter for Human Rights, Minority Rights and Civic Freedoms, supported the creation of National Councils for Minorities, Multi-Ethnic Radio in southern Serbia, Multi-Ethnic Policing in southern Serbia, support for the Roma Community, Refugee and IDP etc.

In addition to the above, it is clear to me that tolerance can best be further promoted through both public awareness and educational programmes. In this respect, the OSCE Mission is planning in 2004 to run a youth educational programme which will have the aim of promoting tolerance and respect. In the past six months the OSCE Mission has also implemented an outreach programme throughout Serbia and Montenegro, which has enabled me personally to visit towns and municipalities all over the country and take the opportunity to directly and indirectly support human

rights, tolerance, multi-ethnicity and civil society. The OSCE Mission also took a proactive stance in supporting international tolerance day this year with the announcement of three new tolerance based projects, which I publicly announced last Tuesday together with Minister Ljajic.

The first of these projects is a media training based initiative. Given the importance of the media in support of tolerance and multi-ethnic understanding, the OSCE Mission unveiled a new programme to train 60 young journalists from both electronic and print media from Albanian, Bosniak and Roma media outlets. This project will provide training primarily for young journalists who will form the future pillars of local minority language media. The training will provide the young journalists with the skills and techniques to report accurately, relevantly and professionally in their own languages. This in turn will provide minorities with better information, news and analysis about issues relevant to their community and life. The project will also have the effect of establishing co-operation between large state-owned and independent media and local media working in minority languages.

Secondly, together with the Ministry for Human Rights and National Minorities, the OSCE has supported a programme to produce and distribute "tolerance notebooks" to schools all over Serbia and Montenegro. The notebooks will illustrate a tolerance message imaginatively created by Korax.

Finally, as a part of the OSCE Mission's support for local self-government, human rights and tolerance, the Mission will present an award of 5,000 Euro this year to a local self government in Serbia and Montenegro that achieved major success in the consolidation of human rights and promotion of tolerance in 2003. This project will aim to both help raise the profile of tolerance at the local level and will also provide a municipality with 5,000 Euro to be spent on tolerance related projects in 2004.

It is the aim of the OSCE Mission that the above three projects, together with ongoing and planned OSCE Mission projects will further consolidate a tolerance-based approach to democracy in Serbia and Montenegro. In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the will of the OSCE Mission to continue supporting all interested actors, including the Ministry of Human Rights, civil society, minority groups and local self governments in the further pursuit of tolerance as a key to democracy and I again take this opportunity to wish the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro a happy day of tolerance.