

Spanish Presidency of the European Union

OSCE High-level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

Astana, 29-30 June 2010

EU Opening statement

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to address this distinguished audience on behalf of the European Union. At the outset, let me express my gratitude to Kazakhstan and to Minister Saudabayev as Chairman-in-Office for hosting us today. Being a multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious country, Kazakhstan is an ideal venue for this high-level conference.

Tolerance and non-discrimination are indispensable pillars of security and cooperation in Europe as are human rights as a whole. Whatever their causes, manifestations of intolerance bring about fractures within societies, undermining their inclusiveness, cohesiveness and capacity to develop. It is only when the rights of all individuals are respected and people throughout the OSCE region learn to value diversity free of intolerance and exclusion that an harmonious and safe life can be possible in our region.

The previous OSCE conferences in Vienna, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Cordoba and Bucharest have contributed to shaping a clear and consistent political message. They have all highlighted the need for participating States to maintain a concerted effort and to continue to develop partnerships with international organizations to share experiences and work toward more tolerant societies. Our meeting today and tomorrow offers us the opportunity to renew our commitments, review their implementation and consider the way forward: how to make progress in promoting the human rights of every individual by combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination in a comprehensive way.

The reality in our societies cannot provide for satisfaction. Despite all our efforts, discrimination based on grounds like race, colour, national, social or ethnic origin, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or other status remains widespread.

Racist, discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes continue to emerge also in the European Union. This is why the EU is dedicated to promoting and protecting respect for human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination in both its internal and its external policies. Based on the principles that all humans are born equal in dignity and rights, the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly prohibits discrimination based on any grounds. We are convinced that all forms of intolerance and discrimination can and have to be fought while respecting other human rights and fundamental freedoms. Within the EU, the Fundamental Rights Agency supports, through data collection and analysis, the

implementation of EU legislation to fight racism and discrimination. The EU is also mainstreaming the fight against discrimination in its cooperation strategies and, through its European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, supports a wide range of civil society organizations in their work against racism, xenophobia and all kinds of discrimination including anti-Semitism and the intolerance suffered by Christians, Muslims and believers of other faiths.

The EU is a strong supporter of the OSCE's work on combating all forms of discrimination and intolerance. This organization has taken a unique approach to addressing such problems, combining high-level political attention with practical measures and mechanisms. The OSCE institutions have been paramount in developing ways and means for implementing our joint political commitment. I would like to point in particular to the focus ODIHR has taken in recent years on education and awareness-raising and combating hate crimes. Dialogue and education play an invaluable role as a tool for integration and respect for diversity.

The OSCE's expertise is a valuable resource which should be drawn upon to confront intolerance and discrimination in all its forms wherever and whenever it occurs within the OSCE region. The EU wishes to thank the ODIHR for its broad and in-depth activities on promoting human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination. The EU also thanks the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office for their contribution to the overall OSCE effort in these areas.

Ensuring tolerance and non-discrimination requires constant vigilance and effort. The OSCE, for all its good work, cannot

achieve this alone. That is why we welcome the Organization's mutually reinforcing cooperation and synergies with other European and UN bodies and initiatives that contribute to promote tolerance, develop intercultural dialogue and prevent conflicts, such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the Alliance of Civilizations.

One of the lessons learned over the last few years is the need to develop specific approaches tailored to each type of discrimination. There is no uniform strategy to counter these phenomena. There is also no difference in importance between the various forms of discrimination. All forms of intolerance must be challenged. There is no hierarchy of evils.

In this context, the EU expects our Organization to pay as much attention to combat manifestations of hatred and intolerance based on sexual orientation as it is paying to other forms of discrimination.

The EU also calls on all participating States to implement their commitments to collect and maintain reliable information and statistics about hate crimes. We encourage them to seek the assistance of ODIHR, in particular in training law enforcement officers, strengthening legislation, data collection and developing educational programmes.

The EU would also like to recall that national and international NGOs contribute to a great extent to the world-wide struggle against discrimination, including racism and that they are in need of both political and financial support to carry out their important task. We call on all countries to genuinely engage

with NGOs in a joint effort to fight all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

Mr. Chairman,

The EU is determined to act through sustained action with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the United Nations in order to promote human rights and combat all forms of intolerance and discrimination. We believe that events such as this High Level Conference are important steps towards achieving our common goal of a more tolerant and inclusive world based on mutual respect and understanding.

Los países candidatos TURQUÍA, CROACIA* e ISLANDIA, los países del Proceso de Estabilización y Asociación y los países candidatos potenciales, ALBANIA, BOSNIA Y HERZEGOVINA, SERBIA y MONTENEGRO, los países de la Asociación Europea de Libre Comercio y los miembros del Espacio Económico Europeo, LIECHTENSTEIN, al igual que GEORGIA se suman a esta declaración.

*Croacia y la Antigua República Yugoslava de Macedonia siguen perteneciendo al proceso de Estabilización y Asociación.