



## Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

### on The Role of Civil Society in the Promotion and Protection of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

Vienna, 26-27 June 2023

#### ANNOTATED AGENDA

#### Background

OSCE participating States have committed to address racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination and intolerance. In a series of Ministerial Council Decisions, participating States have underlined the need for a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to in order to effectively address these issues, while at the same time acknowledging the specificities, uniqueness and historical backgrounds of different forms of intolerance, and recognizing the threat they pose to the security of individuals and communities as well as wider social stability and security.<sup>1</sup> They have also committed to address intolerant discourse while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>2</sup>

Intolerance, discrimination and hate remain serious and pressing issues in the OSCE region despite the progress made in recent years to prevent and counter these phenomena. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine have added to the challenge of effectively addressing these long-standing problems.

Already marginalized and vulnerable groups and communities, including Roma and Sinti, migrants and refugees, are particularly affected, and often find themselves convenient scapegoats for the mounting challenges facing societies across the OSCE region. The gender dimension adds a further intersecting layer of complexity to the already difficult task of countering intolerance and discrimination as their various manifestations continue to impact both women and girls, men and boys, and others in different ways.

Civil society has an integral role in efforts to promote and protect tolerance and non-discrimination in the OSCE region. In a number of Ministerial Council Decisions, participating States have acknowledged the essential role civil society organizations can play in combating intolerance and discrimination and the need to cooperate closely with civil society, in a spirit of dialogue and partnership, to promote mutual respect and understanding.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, OSCE participating States committed themselves to support the development of civil society's capacity to monitor and report hate crimes and to assist victims of hate crime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inter alia, Ministerial Council Decisions Porto 2002, Maastricht 3/03, Maastricht 4/03, Sofia 12/04, Ljubljana 10/05, Brussels 13/06, Madrid 10/07, and Athens 9/09.

<sup>2</sup> MC Decisions 04/03, 10/05, 10/07

<sup>3</sup> Maastricht 4/03, Ljubljana 10/05, Brussels 13/06, Madrid 10/07

<sup>4</sup> Brussels 13/06, Athens 9/09

In recent years, a considerable range of activities and initiatives involving civil society, to advance tolerance and non-discrimination has emerged in the OSCE region. These include coalitions and networks to address intolerance, discrimination and hate crimes towards all affected communities; advocacy efforts with State authorities to address intolerance and discrimination; the development and implementation of awareness-raising programmes to inform and educate about diversity in society as well as in the use of social media and other communication technologies to promote a culture of tolerance, equality and understanding. Civil society are therefore key in fostering tolerance and non-discrimination in the OSCE region yet the space for them has been and continuous to shrink. Insufficient funding, repressive legislation, a diminishing political space to engage, and the inability to view them as an essential partner in the work of promoting human rights, democratic values and processes hamper the efforts of civil society to strengthen basis of peaceful coexistence and societal security.

The third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) will explore the role of civil society in the promotion and protection of tolerance and non-discrimination, assess the effectiveness of their efforts, and discuss what can be done to provide them with the space and support to sustain and strengthen their work.

The objectives of the SHDM include: to review and assess the opportunities and challenges currently facing civil society, including in online spaces, and to exchange good practice on the role of civil society in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. The SHDM will also seek to offer recommendations to OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and other executive structures on how they can assist and support civil society in their efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

## **Day 1**

13.00 – 14.00

### **OPENING SESSION**

*Opening remarks*

*Introductory addresses*

*Technical information*

14.00 – 16.00

### **SESSION I: Civil Society Educational Efforts in Promoting Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

Education is key to fostering a culture that supports equality, including gender equality, promotes understanding, discourages prejudice, and values tolerance and non-discrimination. Both formal and informal education programmes provide important spaces for building shared values, fostering respect for diversity, and encouraging social inclusion and cohesion in diverse societies. OSCE participating States have committed to addressing intolerance and discrimination through the development of educational programmes that foster a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities, religions or beliefs,<sup>5</sup> and to raise public awareness of the existence and unacceptability of intolerance and discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

Civil society groups are well-placed to assist in the implementation of these commitments. They contribute to the development and implementation of long-term societal endeavors that

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<sup>5</sup> Brussels 13/06

<sup>6</sup> Ljubljana 10/05

raise awareness and educate about the importance of human rights, peaceful coexistence and pluralistic societies, and nurture empathy and critical thinking in order to reduce bias and the creation of stereotypes and foster positive attitudes towards diversity. Civil society efforts to create and sustain spaces for dialogue and encounter in which participants, particularly young people, learn about diversity in a natural way is an important element of this broad public educational process for tolerance and non-discrimination. It is in these spaces of exchange and learning that prejudices against others can be reduced, trustful relationships between individuals and communities of different backgrounds can be built, and social inclusion and cohesion can be strengthened.

Civil society, among other groups, are also involved in addressing how online technologies, social media platforms, and generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) may contribute to the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, intolerance and hatred, as well as the role that new communication technologies can play in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. Questions about the value systems embedded in different online technologies, privacy, misinformation, “hate speech”, social isolation, and increased risk to vulnerable populations, including girls and women, are among the many concerns being explored by civil society as part of their broader educational efforts to help young people to develop the capacity to navigate a polarized and deceptive information environment online. They specifically provide tools and resources on how to use social media and communication technologies in ways that foster tolerance, respect for diversity, and inclusion.

This session will highlight good practices that civil society actors deploy to promote tolerance and non-discrimination through public educational initiatives. It will showcase effective methods civil society actors employ to help young people learn about respect for diversity and to address intolerance and hate in the online space, particularly in light of the opportunities and risks posed by generative AI.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- How can states, OSCE institutions and other executive structures better assist and support civil society in their efforts in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, including through public educational programmes?
- What is civil society doing to engage young people in conversations about respect for diversity, equality and inclusion? How effective are these initiatives?
- How can civil society actors equip young people with the attitudes, values, and skills to safely navigate the digital space and to promote tolerance and non-discrimination online? What strategies and approaches have been most effective in this regard?

#### **Day 2**

10.30 – 12.30

#### **SESSION II: Towards Tolerance and Non-discrimination and Addressing Hate Crime for Communities at Risk**

Communities at risk across the OSCE region, including Roma and Sinti, continue to face widespread discrimination and intolerance in many areas of life including in policing, justice systems, housing, education, employment, health and public and political participation. Such treatment is fueled by harmful discourse and stereotyping and often leads to hate crimes and violence. Bias-motivated crime against members of communities at risk has a long-lasting impact on victims and their communities. Women from communities at risk, including Roma, are often victims of discrimination and hate crime based on both ethnicity and gender, which

perpetuates inequality, raises security threats, and sends a plain message of exclusion. Already vulnerable people who fled the war in Ukraine experienced increased hate speech from various stakeholders as well as discriminatory attitudes in access to border crossing, information, shelter, education and employment.

The overall response to people fleeing Ukraine in countries hosting them has been characterized by a clear commitment to provide support. However, as the war continues and sustainable return of people back to Ukraine is not yet in sight, tensions with communities at risk could develop in host countries. Securing sustainable, longer-term integration support that will facilitate the social inclusion of people fleeing Ukraine is therefore crucial. In addition, the stark contrast between approaches to different groups of people in need of international protection raises difficult questions about the state of human rights of migrants and refugees in the OSCE region, non-discrimination, adherence to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and other Conventions, and the universality of human rights.

Civil society groups serve as watchdogs in safeguarding communities at risk against discrimination and other forms of unequal treatment. They play a key role in monitoring, documenting and reporting hate incidents to the relevant authorities. Non-governmental actors not only provide hate crime victim support through counseling and legal services, but also advocate on behalf of victims of hate crime and discrimination for social and legal change.

This session will discuss civil society contributions to counter intolerance, hate and discrimination against communities at risk, including Roma and Sinti, and migrants and refugees. It will assess the challenges faced by civil society in monitoring human rights violations across OSCE region against communities at risk, including their gendered aspects, and provide the space to discuss positive measures implemented by civil society to empower women and youth, to combat stereotyping and prejudice in the media, to promote tolerance and non-discrimination among all stakeholders.

**Questions for discussion:**

- What challenges does civil society face in addressing discrimination and hate crime towards communities at risk, including Roma and Sinti, and migrants including refugees from Ukraine, and particularly girls and women in these communities?
- What are the good practices, tools and lessons learned to support civil society in their efforts to address bias-motivated crimes in the OSCE region?
- What concrete actions can OSCE participating States put in place to support the efforts of civil society, including those dealing with people who fled Ukraine, directed at countering hate crime against communities at risk?

**SESSION III: Civil Society Advancing Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Collaboration, Coalitions and Dialogue**

In recent years, a considerable range of collaborative endeavours, particularly in the form of partnerships, coalitions, networks and alliances, has emerged in the OSCE region as part of multi-stakeholder approaches to advance tolerance and non-discrimination. These initiatives include cooperation between governments and civil society organizations on hate crime issues, as well as broad-based and inclusive civil society coalitions focused on one or more elements of a comprehensive effort to counter all forms of intolerance and discrimination, such as those dedicated to monitoring, recording and reporting of bias-motivated crime or to combating anti-Semitism. Collaboration among civil society actors is critical to efforts to foster mutual respect and understanding as intolerance and discrimination are deeply embedded in the OSCE region; addressing them requires the combined efforts of many communities and organizations.

A notable example of civil society collaboration involving leaders and/or representatives of religious or belief communities are interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships. Against the changing religious and cultural landscape of societies in the OSCE region, such initiatives have emerged at all levels in growing recognition that encounter and collaboration between individuals of different religions and beliefs, including non-believers, are of crucial importance for countering negative stereotypes based on religion or belief, building relationships of openness and trust, and fostering greater tolerance, respect and understanding in society. Indeed, OSCE participating States have specifically committed to promoting, supporting and facilitating open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships.<sup>7</sup>

Preventing and responding to hate crimes is an area where meaningful and sustained state-civil society collaboration has proven beneficial, and it creates an enabling environment for civil society and government representatives to come together to dialogue and exchange in order to identify challenges and opportunities to encourage reporting and enhanced measures for hate crime victim support and protection. A comprehensive national response to addressing bias-motivated crimes requires placing a hate victim's needs and rights at the heart of any action. The inclusion of civil society organizations affirms the victim-centred approach to support and protection. OSCE participating States have specifically committed to cooperating with civil society to assist victims of hate crimes,<sup>8</sup> and a number of states not only engage frequently with civil society providers to ensure effective hate crime victim support, but have formalized this collaborative relationship through, for example, structured cooperation agreements and partnerships.

This third working session will consider the role and effectiveness of collaborative action involving civil society actors, whether among themselves or with state authorities, to advance tolerance and non-discrimination in the OSCE region. It will also provide an opportunity for the sharing of good practices in relation to activities and initiatives specifically involving civil society actors, particularly coalitions for tolerance and non-discrimination and in the area of interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships.

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<sup>7</sup> Maastricht 4/03, Kyiv 3/13

<sup>8</sup> Brussels 13/06, Athens 9/09

**Questions for discussion:**

- What factors are conducive to effective and sustainable civil society coalitions and of interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships, which aim to advance tolerance and non-discrimination? What are the good practices and lessons learned in these areas?
- What are the challenges faced by civil society actors in cooperating with national authorities in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, particularly in supporting a comprehensive approach to addressing hate crimes? What factors are conducive to sustainable cooperation?
- What opportunities exist in the OSCE region for partnerships and networks, involving civil society and other relevant stakeholders, including states, to advance tolerance and non-discrimination?

16.30 – 17.30

**CLOSING SESSION**

*Reports from the working sessions*

*Comments from the floor*

*Closing remarks*

17.30

Closing of the meeting

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