

Delegation of Ukraine

**STATEMENT BY MR. GEORGIY POPOV,
CHAIRMAN OF THE STATE COMMITTEE OF UKRAINE FOR
NATIONALITIES AND RELIGIONS, AT THE OPENING OF THE
OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND
PROMOTING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

Bucharest, 7 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Conference Participants,

Ukraine fully agrees with the position taken by the European Union (EU) on the problems that are the focus of this important conference and has associated itself with the statement made by the distinguished Minister of State of Germany on behalf of the EU. I should like to add a few words on behalf of my country.

The strengthening of mutual respect and mutual understanding within society is of great relevance for Ukraine, which is home to ten million national minorities who represent 130 different ethnic groups and account for 22.2 per cent of the population of our country. There are 55 religious denominations in Ukraine, with over 33,000 religious communities. The fact that the population is made up of so many different ethnic and religious groups means that systematic efforts are needed to develop inter-ethnic and intercultural dialogue.

The State policy of Ukraine in the area of inter-ethnic and interconfessional relations is aimed at ensuring stability and harmony among different ethnic and religious groups and at countering manifestations of intolerance or prejudice towards persons on account of their nationality, ethnic group or religious affiliation.

The fact that Ukraine remains one of the few countries to have emerged from the territory of the former USSR that is free from inter-ethnic conflicts is a result of Ukraine's systematic and constructive ethnic policy, which is based on the traditions of a tolerant attitude towards the representatives of different ethnic groups.

The legislative framework of Ukraine for strengthening tolerance ensures the complete protection of the national and cultural needs of the people.

And these are not just empty words. Thanks to government assistance, there are 1,200 societies for national minorities operating in Ukraine, along with teaching establishments and creative groups for minorities, and newspapers and magazines are published in minority languages.

The Government allocates significant resources for the settlement and integration into Ukrainian society of the Crimean Tartars and representatives of other ethnic groups who were deported and are now returning to Ukraine.

Ukraine will continue to pursue a systematic policy in the future to prevent manifestations of discrimination or intolerance in any form.

In expressing my gratitude for the excellent organization of this conference and the hospitality we have received here in Romania, I wish to mention that in areas of Ukraine where there are large Romanian communities efforts are being made to meet their national and cultural needs. What is more, State assistance to the Romanian community in Ukraine is regarded as a matter of priority. Ukrainian and Romanian agencies, together with authoritative experts from the OSCE and the Council of Europe, are now monitoring the implementation in Romania and Ukraine of the relevant commitments by the two countries for guaranteeing the comprehensive rights of national minorities, which will help us to obtain objective information in this area.

We hope that this conference will make a useful contribution to strengthening the climate of mutual respect and mutual understanding throughout the OSCE area.

Thank you for your attention.