

**SUPPLEMENTARY
HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING**

**Policies and Strategies to Further Promote
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

**Vienna
14-15 April 2016**



Opening remarks by

Michael Georg Link

Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to welcome you on behalf of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to this extremely important event looking at “Policies and Strategies to Further promote Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”.

Taking into account the current climate and issues surrounding diversity and security in the OSCE region and beyond, this meeting is a timely reminder that no society is immune from the problems of intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia, hate crimes and hate speech, and that all groups, communities and societies are affected by these phenomena, which represents a significant challenge to participating States. Hate crimes are a particularly heinous manifestation of discrimination and prejudicial feelings that, if left unchecked, can threaten not just victims, but whole communities and may lead to bigger social disorder. It is also an opportunity to recapitulate and

reaffirm our commitment to tolerance and non-discrimination as well as promote mutual understanding and tolerance.

Additionally, it is important that we seize this opportunity to discuss basic fundamental principles of a pluralistic society; freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, movement, as well as understanding how these fundamental freedoms are maintained whilst addressing the growing threat of terrorism and the rise of more robust security methods and policies. Whilst discussing these inter-related themes, it is also vitally important to examine the nexus between tolerance, or the lack thereof, and security.

Since the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the OSCE has been covering all aspects of security and co-operation. Throughout this time, the OSCE has continually and consistently proven to be a useful forum for participating States to engage in fruitful dialogue as well as a platform for addressing the various contemporary challenges. It is my hope that the meeting here today will continue in this vein.

Beginning with the Helsinki Final Act, OSCE commitments have been expanded, in particular in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and in OSCE Ministerial Council Decisions adopted at Porto (2002), Maastricht (2003), Sofia (2004), Ljubljana (2005), Brussels (2006) and Athens (2009), with participating States further recognizing that it is their primary responsibility to address all of the interconnected issues related to security. On this foundation of ensuring respect for the human rights and the fundamental freedoms of the individual, the OSCE has since built a strategy to foster greater stability within states and to deepen security between them. In connection with these institutional policy frameworks, the OSCE have convened several meetings focussing attention on tolerance and non-discrimination issues most notably – the High-Level Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, Bucharest (2007). High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Astana, (2010) and the High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-discrimination (Including Human Rights Youth Education on Tolerance and Non-discrimination), Tirana, (2013).

As I have mentioned, over the past few years, the issue of tolerance has gained greater importance in light of the recent challenges that contemporary, multicultural and multi-ethnic societies have faced. It has been promoted as a way to address some of the fundamental divisions and differences in society and as the solution to many deep-seated tensions in a number of participating States. This particular point becomes clear when we look at the number of policies and initiatives that are premised upon tolerance and mutual understanding as aspirational goals across the OSCE region and beyond.

Consequently, we have seen a number of promising proactive governmental programmes -- such as training police services to be more responsive as well as representative of contemporary society -- that not only promote tolerance but also firmly embed the twin principles of tolerance and mutual understanding in societal and cultural structures of their particular state. These programmes indicate the strong political will and leadership of the state agencies to ensure sustainable development of mutual understanding and encourages plurality of perspectives, choices, and opinions which indicate that

fundamental rights and freedoms are universal, indivisible and interdependent.

This timely conference will give us the opportunity to fully and openly discuss phenomena related to tolerance and mutual understanding, which are among the main foundations of fundamental rights norms and represent an aspiration that all participating States adhere to. During these challenging times, it is important for us to remember and to recall commitments and to sow the courage and political will to promote these commitments to tolerance and mutual understanding. This meeting will also provide us with the opportunity to explore best practices from across the OSCE region and will allow us to take stock and gather valuable insights and “lessons learned” over the past forty (40) years.

The meeting will be divided into three working sessions.

The first session, entitled: “Challenges to Realizing Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Root Causes and Consequences” will explore the

nature and extent of intolerance and discrimination and provide an overview of the underlying root causes and consequences of racism, intolerance and discrimination throughout the OSCE area.

The second session, entitled: “Education and Awareness-Raising to Prevent Intolerance and Discrimination, including Hate Crimes, Hate Speech and Hate on the Internet”, will explore good strategies available to participating States for the effective prevention of and response to hate crimes, hate speech, and hate on the internet with an emphasis on awareness raising and identifying preventive strategies available to stakeholders, including the development of national action plans and their effective implementation.

The third session is entitled: “Responses to Intolerance and Discrimination, including Hate Crimes, Hate Speech and Hate on the Internet: Tools and Policies”. The focus of the final working session will be to identify next steps that would need to be taken to effectively address intolerance, hate crimes, hate speech and hate on the internet. The session will present best practices and policies from across the

OSCE region that have been implemented in responding to and preventing of intolerance and hate crimes hate speech and hate on the internet.

We are aiming for an interactive, open debate between panellists and participants, and I particularly encourage everyone to make recommendations to address the scourge of intolerance in the OSCE region. We would like to have your views on what can be done to prevent and to respond to the resulting manifestations of this intolerance.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

As with all hate crimes and acts of intolerance, the issue will continue to be a topic of concern and a topic for action for our organization, OSCE/ODIHR. We look forward to hearing your views and to have a vibrant debate.

Thank you for your attention.