

OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding

Follow –up to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance

Bucharest, 7-8 June 2007

Opening plenary session: Combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding

**Statement by Mr. Jaroslav Neverovič
Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania**

Your Excellency Mr. Chairman
Distinguished ministers and heads of delegations
Your Excellencies Ambassadors
Ladies and gentlemen,

Lithuania fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier this morning by the German Minister of State on behalf of the European Union. At the same time, given the importance Lithuania attaches to this conference, we have decided to intervene in order to share our national approach to these questions.

First allow me to thank the Government of Romania for hosting the conference here in Bucharest as well as the OSCE Chair Spain for an excellent organization of this important meeting.

Promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination has evidently been given a prominent place on the agenda of the OSCE over the last years. Lithuania attaches great importance to the OSCE commitments in this field. We would like to express our biggest support to the priorities set up by the Spanish Chairmanship to reinforce the fight against intolerance and discrimination, to promote diversity and participation in plural societies. We do also appreciate the opportunity provided by today's conference to share examples of the best practices in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and to discuss the implementation of existing commitments in that field.

Tolerance is not self-evident and requires concrete actions from both governments and civil society. Sound legislation, effective law enforcement as well as education, youth and media policies play a critical role in pursuit of this goal: a real reduction in all forms of intolerance across the OSCE region. The need to intensify efforts in these areas has been already emphasized in Berlin and Cordoba declarations. These fields of action do also outline the basis for the recommendations of the High Level Group of United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Initiative presented at the end of last year.

Mr. Chairman,

In this context, let me make a few remarks on Lithuania's latest experience in combating discrimination and promotion of tolerance.

Lithuania has on many occasions made clear – the role of education and awareness-raising measures in combating intolerance is of the utmost importance. Education is seen as the most effective and appropriate way to promote mutual respect and understanding. Proper education about one's own history fosters a sense of community and solidarity. On the other hand it must be fairly balanced by knowledge of global issues and understanding and appreciation of other societies and cultures.

Lithuania has used its historical experience in approaching the questions of education with due attention. The Programme of Holocaust Education Activities, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, has been implemented since 2003. The programme aims to promote tolerance and respect for universal human values and mutual understanding, in addition to the formation of historical memory and the development of civic society. Gradually the network of Tolerance Education centers, established by the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, has been expanded and now covers 46 Lithuanian secondary schools. With the help of other non-governmental actors, these centers implement the educational programme on Crimes of the Totalitarian Regimes, the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity and the Promotion of Tolerance. Non-formal education offers ways of addressing issues of identity and contributes to the promotion of a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities, religions and beliefs.

As another example of national initiatives in promoting tolerance and combating discrimination, the new National Anti-discrimination programme, approved at the end of the last year, deserves to be mentioned. The programme is aimed at tackling intolerance and discrimination in all its forms, including discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, racial and national origin and others. It foresees inclusion of the racist or other bias motivation as a specific aggravating circumstance in the Criminal Code. Apart from the review of legal regulations in the field, the programme will evidently result in raising public awareness of different groups of the society, in highlighting the value of national, cultural and religious diversity, and thus in countering the stereotypes and misconceptions that deepen patterns of hostility and mistrust among different members of society.

Lithuania aspires for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2010. Recognizing the OSCE's increased efforts in combating intolerance and discrimination and the importance of a systematic, comprehensive and long-term approach in promoting mutual respect and understanding, Lithuania will continue the work in this field when the decision is taken that Lithuania exercises the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2010.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me finish my intervention with an expression of hope that today's fruitful discussions and shared examples of best practices will stimulate all Participating states to further work in the field of promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. It will hopefully also advance implementation of our commitments to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination across the OSCE region.

Thank you.