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(TGS), AT THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE
AND NON-DISCRIMINATION (INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS
YOUTH EDUCATION ON TOLERANCE AND
NON-DISCRIMINATION)**

Tirana, 21 May 2013

**Plenary session 4: Combating intolerance and discrimination against
Muslims**

Xenophobic, racist prejudices are often the product of a lack of knowledge about other cultures and ethnic groups. From these prejudices, bogeymen can emerge or be created.

Sometimes, such ethnic and/or religious minorities can be cast in the role of this bogeyman. This is particularly the case during times of crisis, when scapegoats are sought. In this way, such minorities are devalued in the eyes of the majority. Sometimes, they are even portrayed as the possible cause of problem situations of the day.

For certain politicians, such times are the ideal opportunity to gain political advantage. They forget their political responsibility and fail to see the damage they might cause to social harmony. By instrumentalizing the media (and particularly electronic media), they can further increase the effects of their ideas. Consciously or unconsciously, they contribute to the marginalization of an ethnic or religious community, and in so doing, they create social divisions. This creates problems and serves as an obstacle to the peaceful co-existence of different cultures (integration). Therefore, such politicians should be given no opportunity to disseminate their ideas. They offer no constructive solutions for the problems that they claim exist.

In 2012, we experienced three cases in Switzerland of xenophobic and Islamophobic statements being disseminated through electronic media. The Turkish Community Switzerland filed suits against those responsible through the public prosecutor's offices under anti-racism legislation (Swiss Criminal Code, Article 261^{bis}), and those responsible were found guilty. The details of these cases are not relevant to this statement.

In these cases, there was also a positive consequence. The leader of the Right-leaning political party to which the aforementioned individuals belonged stated his position on these events through a press release in August 2012. He maintained that there was no place for racist ideas in his party, and that those who expressed such ideas bore individual

responsibility for their words. It was also gratifying to see that the rule of law had functioned appropriately.

We believe that existing legislation in Switzerland, as in many European Union countries, is sufficient in order to prevent or limit such cases. This requires that politicians, lawyers and the media be aware of their responsibilities. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations representing ethnic and religious groups should also take their responsibilities seriously and work with the appropriate agencies to closely follow events so that no unpleasant or irreparable situations arise.

In Europe, which is currently going through a critical phase given the economic difficulties in certain European Union member States, there is a certain risk of xenophobic events. Campaigning against stereotypes and prejudices with the involvement of all institutions and responsible parties (politicians, educational authorities and non-governmental organizations) is therefore all the more necessary.

School pupils and young people, in particular, ought to be better informed about other cultures. This will ensure that potential difficulties in the future are easier to manage. In Switzerland, a great deal is being done in this area.

We thank the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for providing us with this opportunity to speak before this select audience. We should like to continue our efforts in partnership with the OSCE and the ODIHR in future.