

**Address of  
H.E. Mr. Traian Basescu, President of Romania,  
at the opening ceremony of the  
OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination, Promoting Mutual Respect and  
Understanding, follow up to the Conference in Cordoba on Combating Anti-Semitism and  
other Forms of Intolerance  
Bucharest, June 07, 2007**

Chairman in Office of the OSCE,  
Distinguished participants,

I am honored to see that the constant interest that Romania has expressed for the activity of OSCE is now rewarded and Romania has the privilege of organizing this important event.

The topic of this conference represents an important challenge for us all. It is the faithful reflection of the degree of democratization that our societies have achieved, because the term „democracy“ cannot have a meaning unless it genuinely assimilates the notion of „tolerance“.

It is true that, during a political debate or sports event inadequate language occurs. Beyond that, I assure you that the Romanian people have a long tradition of common sense and respect for diversity. This tradition, severely distorted in the period of communist totalitarianism, will get back to normal as Romania will deepen its interactions with the rest of EU member states. I am convinced, as well, that this tradition of tolerance towards diversity has to be supported by a euroconform legal framework. We are trying to enrich this framework and I hope that, through the ongoing education of our citizens, we will reach the best standards of conduct.

After the ratification of the Helsinki Final Act, in 1975, and particularly following the signing of the Paris Chart for a New Europe, in 1990, the OSCE Participating States have set the goal of building democratic societies, based on the full respect of the Human Rights. Our engagements, taken in a free manner, state that „Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law. Democracy is the best safeguard of freedom of expression, tolerance of all groups of society, and equality of opportunity for each person.“ This is what we all have tried to do.

The Participating States have taken concrete engagements that they have tried to implement. Apart from certain notable evolutions at the level of human rights and personal liberties, we bemoan the fact that expressions of intolerance and discrimination have not decreased sufficiently in the last years. In various social environments, including countries with old democratic traditions, certain racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and denial attitudes have re-emerged. The Romanian citizens have been at times the source and at times target of such attitudes. Certain media campaigns have speculated upon the presence of Romanian communities in various states in order to maintain apprehensions and fuel collective blame. Such media campaigns are difficult to explain to the domestic public opinion. I am convinced, however, that Romania's return to the European family will guarantee the dignity of each if my fellow-countrymen. We have the right and, at the same time, the duty to rediscover the pride of our own identity in the cultural diversity of our continent.

We have the permanent duty to react, using all the political and institutional tools at our disposal, for combating the expression of intolerance and discrimination, in any form. We have the democratic obligation to act so that every citizen feels that he is protected by law therefore having the proof of the solidarity of his fellow citizens. Democracy is the only political regime where diversity can truly be respected, for the common benefit.

In this respect, educating the young generation in the spirit of respect for truth, social harmony and respect for diversity has, certainly, a crucial role. The education has the main vocation of conveying, through moral and pedagogic instruments, a message of accountability for the lessons of the past, and knowing the history, the traditions and the culture of the ethnic groups living in our country is the first step towards a progress in good understanding and cohabitation.

To this end, on the occasion of celebrating the International Children's day, I have called upon the youngest Romanian citizens. I believe that we have to convey the same message to all the citizens, irrespective of generations. Freedom and democracy can improve our level of common understanding. They are not purposes as such, but means that can be used to avoid dramas, dramas that occurred each and every time the respect for human beings was denied, for ideological or contextual reasons.

As well as you, I believe that a society is democratic only to the extent that it defends the rights of each individual; there are no so called „isolated incidents“. If we are complacent, we might awake all the demons that have troubled the life of Europe: racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism can spread like a fire, whenever the vigilance of governments and civil society decreases.

That is why, in the last decade, Romania has established a complex system of legislative and institutional tools, aimed at preventing and sanctioning the intolerance. I refer myself particularly to the Law on prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination which led to the establishment of the National Council for Combating Discrimination; or, as another example, the Ordinance for prohibiting the organizations and symbols having a fascist, racist or xenophobic character and the cult of persons guilty of crimes against peace and humanity.

With regard to the fight against anti-Semitism, we have taken actions for recovering the national memory, on one hand, and on the other for strengthening the educational dimension of this process. Therefore, we have established, under the chairmanship of professor Elie Wiesel, an International Commission for the Study of Holocaust in Romania, whose recommendations we are deeply committed to fully implement. We already established the „Elie Wiesel“ National Institute for the Study of Holocaust and courses of History of Holocaust have been introduced in the high school curricula, together with a manual for those who teach these courses.

The measures for fighting against the discrimination of Roma are coordinated through the activity of the National Agency for Roma, subordinated to the Romanian Government. In 2001, a governmental strategy for improving the situation of Roma was issued; at international level, Romania participates in the initiative on The Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005-2015. I would also like to underline that the Holocaust Memorial, for which the works have been inaugurated, will also include documents on the Roma that have been persecuted for racial reasons.

Against this background, I would like to inform you that Romania has one of the most comprehensive legislations concerning the respect of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The Romanian model of minorities' protection is recognized at European level but, unfortunately, this type of European treatment for national minorities has yet to be followed by Romania's neighbor states, such as Serbia, Ukraine or Hungary, where important Romanian communities live.

Chairman in Office of OSCE,  
Distinguished participants,

Every government in the OSCE area has the duty to implement national mechanisms aimed at combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect. Such mechanisms can also be consolidated by launching high level diplomatic initiatives, aimed at maintaining the European and international cooperation in the field.

I would like to conclude by wishing every success to the participants to the works of the conference and a pleasant staying in the Capital of Romania. As a President of the host country, I declare open the meeting of the OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination, Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, follow up to the Conference in Cordoba on Combating Anti-Semitism and other Forms of Intolerance.

Thank you.

*The Department for Public Communication  
07 June 2007*