

**OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING
MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING
(7-8 June 2007, Bucharest)**

**Session 6: Addressing racist, xenophobic and discriminatory public discourse spread
through, *inter alia*, the media, Internet, satellite TV and extbooks, while respecting
freedom of expression**

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

As my delegation has stated yesterday at the Opening Session, one of the novelties of the Bucharest Conference is this session that is dedicated exclusively to a discussion on how to address the spread of racist, xenophobic and discriminatory public discourse without jeopardizing the exercise of freedom of expression. Research shows that racist conduct or racial harassment occurs most commonly in the form of speech and writing. Besides the obvious personal psychological harm that victims of hate speech suffer, racist, xenophobic and discriminatory discourse also promotes and fosters ideologies based on intolerance and discrimination. Often times, as one speaker highlighted during the NGO Preparatory Meeting, it sneaks under the threshold of awareness.

Since 2005 Ljubljana Ministerial Council, the OSCE has recognized the growing significance of the phenomenon of public discourse in countering or perpetuating intolerance. In Ljubljana, we, the participating States, emphasized the need for consistently and unequivocally speaking out against acts and manifestations of hate, particularly in political discourse. Last year in Brussels Ministerial Council, after debating for a year on how best to respond to the dilemma of dealing with hate speech during and after the cartoon debacle, our Ministers were able to come out with a strong statement which expressed deep concern for racist, xenophobic and discriminatory public discourse and deplored it. The Ministers have also acknowledged and stressed that the positive role that political representatives can play in the overall promotion of mutual respect and understanding and in defusing tensions within societies, by speaking out against hate-motivated acts and incidents and by recognizing the positive contributions that all individuals can make to a pluralistic society. Short of legal action, the best remedy for an intolerant political discourse, we believe, is a stronger tolerant discourse by the political leaders reflecting their will and determination. We therefore would like to make the following recommendations:

- The political leaders must pledge to react swiftly and forcefully to those who abuse freedom of expression, in whatever sophisticated or subtle form which may often remain below the threshold of legal action, for pursuing populist political agendas by inciting racial and religious hatred.

- The political parties should be encouraged to adopt codes of ethical conduct to commit their members to refrain from racist, xenophobic and discriminatory discourse, also during election campaigns when their statements are cast in higher relief. These codes of conduct should also contain reasonable sanctions voluntarily applied in case of non-compliance.
- The ODIHR election observation missions should monitor the public discourse during election campaigns and report on cases of racist, xenophobic and discriminatory discourse.

In concluding, Mr. Moderator, it would be remiss if we did not discuss the role of media in terms of addressing hate speech and racist discourse. We, the participating States, emphasized in Brussels Ministerial last year the strong influence media can have in countering or exacerbating misperceptions, prejudices. Therefore, we encouraged the journalists to adopt voluntary professional standards, media self-regulation and other appropriate mechanisms for ensuring increased professionalism, accuracy and adherence to ethical standards. Furthermore, it would also be of great help to vulnerable groups if their representatives would be given access to the media in order to speak out against prejudices and biased portrayal of their communities in public discourse. The media can also contribute to mutual understanding by informing the public opinion about success stories regarding integration and participation.

Thank you.