



German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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

EU Opening Statement

Gernot Erler, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Berlin

Excellencies, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am glad and honoured to address this important audience on behalf of the European Union. Let me first of all express my gratitude to Romania for her gracious hospitality. I also wish to thank Minister Cioroianu and Minister Moratinos as Chairman-in-Office for their leadership in taking the initiative for this conference.

Combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding – the title of our meeting brings us to the very core values to which the OSCE has subscribed since its beginnings as a multilateral conference.

The European Union looks back with great satisfaction on the broad political consensus reached within the OSCE over the three decades which went by since the Helsinki Final Act. For participating States, but also for NGO's and other International Organisations it is a shared conviction that tolerance and non-discrimination are indispensable pillars of security and cooperation in Europe.

The previous OSCE conferences in Vienna, Brussels, Paris and Cordoba as well as the Berlin Conference on Antisemitism have contributed to shaping a clear and consistent political message. Our meeting today gives us another opportunity to renew this commitment and to discuss its implementation.

The EU has a deep commitment to tolerance, ladies and gentlemen, precisely because intolerance has for so long been part of European history. Intolerance has been a root cause for instability and war. Suffice it to point to the destabilizing influence of antisemitism which has undermined democracy in Germany between the two World Wars. Let me quote Federal Chancellor Merkel from her speech before the European Parliament : “... our history over the centuries certainly gives us in Europe absolutely no right to look down on the people and regions of the world who have problems practising tolerance today. Yet our history over the centuries obliges us in Europe to promote tolerance throughout Europe and across the globe and to help everyone practise it.”

The EU is dedicated to promoting and protecting tolerance and non-discrimination in both its internal and its external policies. EU directives require all our member states to introduce legislation against discrimination on grounds of race, sex, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief. Let me just mention two new instruments which complement the domestic EU policy in this area. In April, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council, after years of negotiation, agreed on a Council framework decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. This way we have created EU-wide common standards to outlaw racism and holocaust denial. Shortly before, the Vienna-based European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia has been strengthened to serve as a full-fledged Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union.

The EU also cooperates closely with the comprehensive network of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

The European Union will make use of every opportunity to work with the OSCE in joint activities. The work of the OSCE field missions, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media provide broad opportunities for close cooperation. In particular, the EU wishes to thank the ODIHR for its broad and in-depth activities on tolerance and non-discrimination. The EU also thanks the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman in Office for their contribution to the overall OSCE effort in combating intolerance and discrimination. They have given a human voice and face to the

OSCE's combat against antisemitism, islamophobia as well as, racism, xenophobia, discrimination against Christians and other forms of intolerance.

The institutional framework for combating the various forms of discrimination seems to be comprehensive and efficient. The problems start with *implementation*. This is what we have to focus upon.

The reality in our societies cannot provide for satisfaction. Despite all our efforts, discrimination based on ideas like race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or other status remains widespread in our societies. People are discriminated against on the grounds of their sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, social origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, property, or a disability. Discrimination against Sinti and Roma needs our continued attention. Antisemitism is re-appearing, sometimes in surprising new clothing. New forms of racism have taken shape in the wake of globalisation, the formation of multi-ethnic societies and the fight against terrorism, affecting in particular ethnic or religious minorities, immigrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers.

One of the lessons learned over the last years is the need to develop specific approaches tailored to each type of discrimination. There is no uniform strategy to counter these phenomena. There is also no difference in importance between the various forms of discrimination. There is no hierarchy of evils, they are all in opposition to our basic ethical norms and political creed.

The methods which are needed to counter discrimination in all its forms vary greatly. This is why an exchange of best practices like this conference is so important. The OSCE institutions have been paramount in developing ways and means for implementing our joint political commitment. I would like to point in particular to the focus ODIHR has taken in recent years on education and awareness-raising and combating hate crimes. The educational material on antisemitism developed by ODIHR together with the Anne Frank-House Amsterdam is an outstanding example for the pragmatic approach which we have to take.

Mr. Chairman. Diversity in our increasingly complex societies is a challenge. It is also an opportunity and an asset. Mutual respect and understanding are prerequisites for

tapping the potential that diverse and pluralistic societies have. The EU stands ready to join hands with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the United Nations in order to take concrete action in the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination. The issue is and will remain to be high on the agenda of the EU's policymakers.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA country Norway, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.