

**Contribution of the Albanian Delegation to the OSCE's
High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

Session 7: Strategies for promoting tolerance and understanding, inter-ethnic and intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension, in the OSCE area

**NATIONAL STRATEGY
ON INTERCULTURAL, INTERFAITH AND INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE
FOR
THE 2 YEAR WORK PLAN
OF
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS**

Tirana, January 2009

I - Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Albania, in line with its ever growing commitment within the United Nations for the promotion of a culture of peace, mutual understanding and co-existence among nations and the peoples, in the interest of common peace and prosperity, fully supports the objectives set in the framework of the Initiative of the General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon for the Alliance of Civilizations.

As a member of the Group of Friends to the Alliance of Civilizations, the Republic of Albania gives its full support, via its Government, to the **Recommendations** presented by the **High-Level Group**, established by the General Secretary of the United Nations in the year 2006. It is committed to follow the directions defined in the **2-year Implementation Plan**, designed by the **High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC), President Jorge Sampaio** in line with the High-Level Group Recommendations, as a response to the risk of the artificial divisions among the communities belonging to different cultures, religions and ethnicities

II - NATIONAL STRATEGY

The Strategy of the Government of Albania (GoA) on Intercultural, Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue is based on such fundamental documents like the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, AoC documents as well as on the commitment of the GoA the other Albanian high state institutions to the achievement of the standards foreseen in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic integration, and the UNESCO Convention on “the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions”.

This strategy is also built upon the excellent heritage of the inter-confession harmony in Albania and reflects, through identifying the areas of action at a national and regional level, the so far positive practices in the management of the Intercultural, Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue.

This strategy is drafted in the spirit of the expressed political will of the Albanian Government and other high state institutions to contribute to the continuous improvement of the relationships among the three existing religious communities in Albania: Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox communities, as well as to the promotion of a harmonious relationships among the majority of the Albanian population and other ethnic and cultural minorities in the country. Of an equal importance is the objective to contribute to the continuous improvement of the interethnic and interstate relationships in the

region at large, in the four areas defined by the **Alliance of Civilizations in UN: education, youth, migration and media**.

In the process of implementing the National Strategy for Intercultural, Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue, the GoA intends to directly involve some of the main line Ministries, to closely cooperate with non-governmental organizations, which will draft their concrete action plans as a follow-up to this Strategy, and the fundamental principles of AoC, which considers diversity to be a source of development and that any misunderstanding or miscommunication should be resolved through dialogue and a better understanding of the each-other's values.

The implementation process of this Strategy will be worked out in cooperation with the AoC, the UN agencies, the EU, the OSCE, as well as with other important regional and global organizations and centres which conduct activities related to intercultural, interfaith and interethnic dialogue. In the same way, joint projects will be proposed to the neighboring countries, in the AoC spirit of intensifying the bilateral relationships with each of them.

In this framework, the GoA will join the initiatives of AoC countries and those involved in the Euro- Mediterranean partnerships, to implement various projects and activities during 2009, the Intercultural and International Year of Languages as declared by UN.

Within 2009 the Government of Albania is committed to hold the **South East Europe Inter-confession Dialogue Forum**. This Forum will follow the Tirana Conference held on the same topic in December 2004, and will be the first to start off the high level periodical meetings. These meetings, by evoking the successful practices of the Albanian society regarding harmony amongst the three religious communities, will transform Tirana into the centre of the debates and solutions to the new challenges and risks deriving from the inter-confessional conflicts, stereotypes or prejudices.

III – MAIN AREAS OF ACTION

The contribution to the continuous improvement of the interethnic and interstate relationships in the region at large, in the four areas defined by the **Alliance of Civilizations in UN: education, youth, migration and media** is an important objective.

1. EDUCATION

The educational system in Albania, like in other countries, is actually facing the challenge of educating the new generation in the context of an interdependent world, which cannot and should not be isolated within the community

identities. Understanding the history of the peoples and communities belonging to other cultures, religions or ethnicities, fosters the concept of the common human destiny and solidarity among the different individuals, communities and ethnicities. Understanding the others, especially in the Balkans, will speed up the healthy detachment from the hatred and the misunderstandings of the past; will nurture dialogue and respect for one another; will open up the eyes of the peoples towards the European common future. This prerogative is of paramount importance for the whole South East Europe, where the Euro- Atlantic integrating processes are still accompanied by more or less evident history deeply rooted prejudices, regarding the neighborhood relationships amongst the peoples in the region.

In this framework, the GoA intends to uphold the good work started a few years ago with the UNESCO support, regarding the Joint Interstate Commissions with neighboring countries for the review of the history textbooks, to free them from the still surviving expressions of interethnic hatred and dislikes of one people towards the other. Such expressions are reminiscences of a dramatic past in the relationship amongst neighbors, where nationalism prevailed. With the final settlement of the Kosova's status, as an independent republic, the GoA will propose to Serbia the establishment of a similar Joint Commission.

In response to the AoC Implementation Plan for the two upcoming years, the ministry of Education will financially support a nongovernmental organization operating in the area of the Alliance of Civilizations, to translate and widely replicate, especially amongst the youth, the **"History of Mankind"**, a project confirmed by UNESCO as precious instrument in the hands of the Albanian society to know the values inherited by mankind related to the promotion of mutual respect and solidarity among peoples and communities of different cultural, ethnical or religious identities, and also to help, beyond the inherited taboos, to the correct understanding by all the citizens that the human cultural development is a constant and multifaceted process of exchange of values and not a survival process of the isolated realities.

The Albanian national education, in all its forms of appearance, including the education of the young generation about music, sports, theatres and films, should strive for the strengthening of the communication bridges among the communities and peoples belonging to different ethno-cultural and religious identities and avoiding the individual or collective excluding attitudes, which consider that the interests of a cultural, religious or ethnic group are superior and hold priority even at the expense of the other groups' interests; or the historical victimization of a group may justify, under certain circumstances, the revenge against other groups.

2. YOUTH

The global increase of mobility and youth organizations, over the recent years, has opened up new opportunities for the mobilization of the Albanian youth. Students exchange programs, sports activities, a more active public and political participation of the youth have created appropriate opportunities for

the promotion of intercultural understanding and respect for diversity in general.

3. EMIGRATION

Actually the country has the largest migration level in Europe with around 25% of the general population, or around 35% of its active population. Treating this phenomenon in view of the integration of migrants, appears to be problematic, bearing in mind that the new challenges the host countries are coping with, reflect the interaction among populations with different ethnical and confessional considerations.

4. MEDIA

Media, in all its forms of expression, has got a huge potential to serve as a bridge among cultures and societies.

LIST OF ACTIVITIES

1. EDUCATION

1.1 Civic and peace education: Civic education, as subject taught in schools, creates the necessary opportunities to tackle with adolescent and young people the issues related to identity and cultivating in them the respect for diversity. Radical ideologies lead to a world characterized by exclusive and aggressive attitudes. Therefore, such approaches should be avoided by fostering the sense of respect towards different cultures, on the basis of common values and ideals. If we really want to live in a plural and global world, it is indispensable that the citizens cope with these principles as sanctioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UNESCO fundamental documents on Cultural Diversity.

1.2 All-inclusive and intercultural education: This objective should aim for an upgrade of the students' attendance in the compulsory education, especially of the more problematic categories like **female and Roma students**. Regarding the latter, there is a need to intensify the efforts in line with the Decision of the Council of Ministers Nr. 633, dated 18.09.2003 "On the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma minority", as well as the Instruction Nr. 6, dated 29.03.2006, of the Minister of Education and Science "On the school enrolment of the Roma students who do not have a birth certificates". In the same way, in relation to the above categories (females and individuals from Roma communities), free vocational education will keep up being offered following the Order Nr. 782, dated 04.04.2006 of the minister of Labour, Social Issues and Equal Opportunities, offering them equal opportunities to integrate in the labour market.

1.3 Exchange programs, at the post-graduate level: The experiences of recent years, like the EU Erasmus Program, have indicated that exchange programs for university professors and post-graduate students have had a very positive impact. These exchanges have proven to be highly useful in the

transfer of the scientific knowledge, which is a key factor in fostering the development of a country in the process of the democratic transition like Albania. On the other hand, our post-communist experience of more than 15 years shows that such exchange programs are also useful for a better understanding of the cultures of the other populations on the part of the individual Albanian professors and students, who came out of a long period of isolation and xenophobia.

The Albanian Government will request the European Commission to increase the number of such programs in the coming years as a substantial contribution that the European Union will render to the Albanian society for the transformation of its mentality. In the same way, the Albanian Government will recommend that such programs be largely included in the bilateral agreements for cultural exchange between the countries, including the Muslim ones. The Albanian Government expresses its good will to welcome students and professors from these countries to the Albanian universities.

- 1.4 **Education and Religion:** The right to freely choose and practice religion is sanctioned in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The education system in Albania, including religious non-public schools existing, should review all its curricula, so that the subjects taught in schools instill in students the understanding and the respect for other religious beliefs, their different religious practices and towards the other cultures in the world. Not just the elites, but the entire society needs to have an accurate knowledge and respect for the religious traditions of the other.
- 1.5 **The New Information Technologies and Internet Access:** The uneven distribution of the computers and the lack of Internet access especially in the rural areas, impede internal spreading of the concept of cultural plurality. In the absence of a broadband internet access, especially in the school system, the populations of these rural areas won't be able to fully access the information and as a result, will not benefit from the interactive impacts of a multicultural world. The objective of the Albanian Government to extend the Internet service in all the high schools of the country within the first half of 2009, fit in with the aims of the AoC for the coming two years. Such objectives, which benefits especially the youth of the rural areas, should be accompanied with continuous national and international support for the provision of the electronic sites with a focus on the intercultural understanding and dialogue.
- 1.6 **Education for work and life:** The reform of the educational system has been a high priority for the GoA. It should provide for a high quality preparation of the young generation for the labor market. This objective is being implemented through the upgrade of the high school curricula, and especially through the extension of the network of vocational schools on a country scale. These schools are established in accordance with the National Strategy for the Economic Development of the country, as well as by closely following the vocations on high demand announced by the Foreigners' Employment Offices in Western Europe.

Under such circumstances, due attention should be paid to the Life Long Learning, which enables the mobility to different programs within the national framework of accumulation and recognition of the qualifications credits acquired in different forms and ways of education, formal, informal and non formal ones.

The European Integration sets forth such requirements which necessitate the inclusion of the Vocational Education and Formation in the course of the contemporary developments, in concert with the current developments in the region and in the European Union. The impacts of the Bologna, Lisbon and Copenhagen processes are present in Albania and are exerting a positive “pressure” at the political level for moving from ‘the partial remedy of the instant needs” towards “ the long-term solutions” in the context of the regional and European integration.

2 YOUTH

2.1. Expansion of the opportunities for the youth mobilization: The global increase of mobility and the youth organizations over the recent years has opened up new opportunities for the mobilization of the Albanian youth. The students exchange programs, sports activities, a more active public and political participation of the youth have created appropriate spaces for the promotion of the intercultural understanding and the respect to diversity in general.

Furthermore, the special encouragement of the youth participation in the decision making processes leads to real societal benefits, taking into account that the young generation is a source of energy and new ideas favouring positive changes. In this regard, it is of great importance that the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports should design various programs aimed at informing the public about the potential of the young generation for mobilization, as main actors of the transformation processes of the society and as autonomous partners of the other social groups.

2.2. Youth joint exchange programs and activities at the Balkans level: Youth exchanges constitute an effective method for overcoming cultural barriers, for raising intercultural awareness and for further development of the young individuals. In this context, it would be appropriate for our region to conduct programs that enhance exchanges among the youth coming from different cultural or ethnical realities, following the successful models applied in other regions of the world and the lessons drawn from the European and Euro-Mediterranean experiences.

2.3. Social economic inclusion: Youth employment remains a real concern both at a national and global level. The drafting of appropriate strategies aimed at boosting participation of the youth in the economic life, and especially ones that encourage their entrepreneurial spirit, constitute important avenues to address the phenomenon of the youth unemployment.

The drafting of active policies with a focus on the marginalised youth through combining the (initially) free training and employment and the instructions on

the vocational formation with the youth business programs are significant elements to facilitate the youth employment.

A considerable part of the youth belonging to the Roma community have been unemployed for a number of years and most of them still are not capable of finding a job.

The main reasons for the high levels of such a long-term unemployment of the Roma community are related to: (i) lack of schooling, (ii) regional disadvantages, (iii) discrimination, (iv) poor employment policies for the Roma community since they are not even registered as unemployed.

Besides, the following will be important steps to be taken: (i) identifying the vocations attractive and easy to acquire by the Roma, (ii) conduct of the vocational formation courses around the identified vocations in the public and private vocational education centres.

An inter-ministerial working group will set up to draft a short and mid-term strategy addressing the youth employment issue, the fiscal allowances and other governmental support to the enterprises employing young people as well as to the young people who intend to start off their own business. This strategy will entail several legal amendments and also needs to be endorsed by the Parliament, hence a better awareness of the PMs versus this major issue.

2.4. Promotion of participation: At the local level, the inclusion of the youth in Municipality Councils, youth organizations and the executive units of the civil society institutions and organizations, provide the youth with the opportunity of being part of the process in the drafting of the work plans, and in turn encouraging them to take over constructive roles in the communities they belong to. Over the last years, there have been positive developments with regard to the youth representation, assisted by the creation of regional youth networks. These networks should be further used via the identification of the specific projects, which facilitate the mobility of the youth from different cultural, religious and ethnic realities.

3. EMIGRATION

3.1. The dynamic dimension of emigration: Actually most countries in the world are either countries of origin or countries of destinations for emigrants. After the fall of the communist regime in the early 90-s, Albania went through a massive movements of immigrants, heading mainly to Greece and Italy, but also to other European countries and the U.S.A. Currently, the country has the largest migration level in Europe with around 25% of the general population or around 35% of the active population. Treating this phenomenon in light of immigrants' integration appears to be problematic, considering that the new challenges the host countries are coping with reflect the interaction among populations with different ethnical and confessional backgrounds.

In this context, it is important to consider how the dynamics of their interaction is reflected by the media, the nature of the political and cultural discourse over this issue, and also the way the decision makers address this issue. Peoples'

perception of immigrants is closely related to the positive or a negative image for the emigrants' country of origin, thus leading to the improvement or worsening of the perceptions of the peoples for each-other, as case can be.

Therefore, there is a need for cooperation between governments and civil society organizations of the host countries and the countries of origin that can contribute to the mutual understanding between peoples. The GoA feels obliged to work at a bilateral level with the Governments of countries hosting Albanian emigrants to transform them in bridges of friendship among the peoples.

3.2. The GoA considers indispensable the drafting of national and regional strategies for the prevention of the cruel and discriminatory treatment of the emigrants. Erecting "walls" in-between the nations is none of a solution. In this context, the most promising approach results to be the cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination, in order to jointly manage the phenomenon of massive emigration.

3.3. The challenges posed by emigration: The integration of emigrants' communities may lead to a number of challenges like lack of access to education, to social services, to housing, to employment, to procedures for acquiring the new citizenship, not to mention coping with the racism-related experiences. Therefore, there is a need to take all the necessary steps to draft and approve Memorandums of Understanding with the neighbouring countries on rights of emigrants in the area of social and health insurance.

3.5. The struggle against the discrimination: Significant steps have been taken in the framework of the European Union regarding the elaboration and implementation of policies fostering participation of emigrants in the host countries. Among such steps is worth mentioning the adoption of the European Employment Strategy, which aims at getting rid of the obstacles to the employment of emigrants and ethnic minorities, and the establishment of the European Union Centre for the Monitoring of Xenophobia and Racism (EUMC). These practices should serve as a basis for the rights of the emigrants and as a road map for the European integration of Albania. The Government may intensify its cooperation with the countries hosting Albanian emigrants to expanding the scope of their economic, social and political rights, in keeping with the European Social Charter (revised), signed and ratified by the GoA.

3.6. The support for an all-inclusive dialogue at all the levels: Defining coherent integration strategies entails the development of a constant dialogue among the representatives of the Governments, emigrants' communities, civil society and employers at a local, national and regional level. The institutional structures constantly supporting this dialogue provide for the efficacy of such approaches, and further advance emigrants' integration. These efforts also assist in balancing off the demands for integration and the need for the preservation of the respective cultural and religious identity.

3.7. The leadership: The political and religious leaders, as well as the civil society in Albania should assist in creating the appropriate climate by incorporating in it the debates on emigration and the protection of the

emigrants' human rights and by evoking the emigrants' contribution in the life and prosperity of the host community.

3.8. The Government should encourage, through legal, financial and fiscal incentives, the return of the successful emigrants and the investment of their financial, human and social capital in Albania, since they constitute an important factor and resource for the development of the country.

3.9. In line with the Millennium Development Goals, poverty eradication is one of the most effective measures for reducing the emigration level and provision of the employment conditions to the emigrants willing to return to their home country.

4. MEDIA

The impact of media in shaping the opinions: Media, in all its forms of expression, has got the potential of serving as a bridge among cultures and societies.

In such a context, it is important to support the Rapid Response Media Mechanism that AoC will launch during the Madrid Forum with the aim of creating an online site of experts to be easily approached for consultation by the media in times of crises.

The Internet and the digital revolution: The Internet and the development of the digital media have opened up new avenues for the media consumers in general, promoting the interpersonal communication. The Internet can serve as an ideal network for the societal interaction and is a unique forum for the exchange of ideas and information. In this regard, the Internet is an efficient mechanism to remedy the cultural and religious diversities by establishing links for the various activists and partners capable of advancing the dialogue and understanding.

IV – ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

- STRUCTURE

- NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE

1. Under the auspices of the Prime Minister, the National Committee is established as the permanent authority to supervise the realization of the Implementation Plan of AoC, as well as the National Strategy drafted for this purpose. The National Committee is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister.
2. The Committee includes the highest ranked officials of the line ministries charged with the implementation of this Strategy, as well as the heads of state institutions like the State Committee on Minorities, the Committee

- of Cults, the special representative of the Head of the Supreme Court, the special representative of the General Prosecutor's Office, head of the Muslim Community, head of the Orthodox Church, head of Bektashian Community or their representative, civil society representatives, the Head of the Chamber of Attorney, head of Albanian Helsinki Committee, director of the Albanian Media Institute, the President of the Albanian Forum for the Alliance of Civilizations. In the future other civil society representatives may join the National Committee. This Committee convenes at least, twice a year
3. Upon request, the National Committee reports, in writing or verbally, to the President of the Republic, to the Prime Minister, to the Parliament and its different standing committees or at a plenary session, and informs on the activities organized at a national and international level, as a follow-up of the AoC Action Plan. Upon request, the Chair of the National Committee or the Minister of Foreign Affairs reports or informs these high level authorities on behalf of the National Committee. In the absence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chair of the National Committee may assign other representatives to report or inform.
 4. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Labor, Social Issues and Equal Opportunities, the State Committee for Minorities and the Committee of Cults are responsible for the implementation of this Strategy.
 5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will report to the National Committee on the international activities conducted in the framework of the AoC Implementation Plan and especially on the role played by Albania in these activities, at least, once a year.
 6. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible to inform the High Representative of the General Secretary of the United Nations for the AoC and the two Co-Chairs of the latter, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Spain and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey on the implementation of the Albanian National Strategy. To this end, the above Ministries in charge of the implementation of this Strategy, have the obligation to regularly inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the implementation of the National Strategy and the future tasks deriving from it, as per the above mentioned sectors.

PROJECTS

- In response to the AoC Implementation Plan for the two upcoming years, the ministry of Education will financially support a non-governmental organization operating in the area of the alliance among civilizations, to translate and widely replicate especially amongst the youth, the **"History of Mankind"**, a project confirmed by UNESCO as precious instrument in the hands of the Albanian society to get to know the values inherited by mankind related to the promotion

of mutual respect and solidarity among peoples and communities of different cultural, ethnical or religious identities.

- **All-inclusive and intercultural education:** This objective should head for an increase of students' attendance in the compulsory education, especially the more problematic categories like **female and Roma students**. **The Ministry of Labor, Social Issues and Equal Opportunities** will provide them with real opportunities for their integration in the labor market.

- **The university professors and the post-university students' exchange** programs only have a positive impact. These exchanges have proven to be highly useful in the transfer of the scientific knowledge, which are crucial in fostering the development of a country going through its democratic transition, like Albania. The Albanian Government will extend to the **European Commission** the request to **increase the number of such programs in the coming years**, as a substantial contribution that the European Union will render to the Albanian society for the transformation of its mentality.

- **The organization of an International Conference** on the topic: "The Challenges and the Potentials of the Integration of Albania in the European Union".

- **The organization and the promotion** of seminars and meetings related to the **issues of democracy, human rights and the role of the religion in the modern societies**.

- The review of all the curricula of the education system in the country, including the religious non public schools existing in Albania, so that the subjects taught in schools **instill in students the understanding and the respect to the other religious faiths and the different religious practices and towards the other cultures in the world**.

- **The lack of Internet access, especially in the rural areas, impedes the internal spreading of the concept of cultural plurality**. In the absence of a broadband Internet access, especially in the school system, the populations of these rural areas won't be able to fully access the information and as a result, will not benefit from the interactive impacts of a multicultural world. The objective of the GoA is **to expand the Internet service to all the high schools of the country within the first half of 2009**.

- **Exchange of youth joint programs and activities at the Balkans level**. In this context, the programs which promote exchange among youth coming from different cultural or ethnical realities are of interest to our region. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports will draft varied relevant programs.

- It is foreseen the **establishment of an inter ministerial working group** in charge of elaborating a short and mid-term strategy **addressing the youth employment**, the fiscal allowance and other of governmental support for the enterprises employing young people as well as for young people daring enough to start off their own business.

In this regard, a considerable number of young people representative of the **Roma community**, who have been jobless for many years, continue to be problematic. Most of them are not competitive and unable to find a job even at present.

- **Promotion of the good interfaith relationships**, identifying and follow up of the cases related to the violence of the right to religious belief, as well as those provoking terroristic acts, violence and suicide bombings inspired by certain religious ideals.

- Production of Brochures and Documentary films to **promote the values** identified by the AoC.

- The country has actually the largest level of emigration in Europe, with around 25% of the general population or around 35% of the active population. The GoA has the obligation to work on a bilateral level with the governments of the countries hosting Albanian emigrants, so that the latter **seriously bridge up the peoples of these countries**. It will develop a regular dialogue with the representatives of the Governments of these countries, emigrants' communities, civil society and the employers at the local, national and the regional level.

- The support to the Rapid Response Media Mechanism by creating **an online site of experts**, whom can be directly approached by the media for consultancy in times of crises.