

STATEMENT

by

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at the

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the starting points for discussions in this session is the Ministerial Statement on Migration from the 2006 Brussels Ministerial Council. If one considers this text, one finds a reference to Ministerial Decision No. 2/05 from the 2005 Ljubljana Ministerial Council. If one considers this second text, one finds references to a range of documents going back as far as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Thus while migration and the problems of discrimination against migrants may have only reached the public awareness in the last few years, the OSCE has been paying attention to these issues for much longer.

The Ministerial Statement on Migration makes clear the increasing importance of migration. It states: “the phenomenon of migration has been growing, both in scope and in complexity”. A recent report in Germany’s Die Zeit newspaper (15.11.2007) pointed out that this is a fact with which we are confronted on a daily basis in Vienna, the home of the OSCE. According to the study quoted in the newspaper, 16.3 percent of all residents of Austria have what sociologists call a “migration background”. In Vienna, this figure is over 30 percent. Similar statistics exist for much of the OSCE region.

The Ministerial Statement on Migration also makes clear the importance of migration for all dimensions of the OSCE’s work. It states: “we encourage all relevant OSCE institutions and structures [...] to continue their work on migration and integration issues *in all three dimensions*”. This reference draws our attention to the fact that questions related to migration and integration are not limited to one aspect of our work but can have wide-reaching consequences for all elements of security.

The same can be said for discrimination against women and other forms of discrimination. Discrimination against women, migrants, persons belonging to minorities, or any other members of our societies has the potential to create real risks for security and stability. It is for this reason that the OSCE is so involved in fighting all forms of discrimination.

The participating states of the OSCE have committed themselves to uphold and promote the principle of equality and non-discrimination and to ensure that the appropriate legislative standards are reflected in reality. Let me recall that the equal treatment of women and minorities is embodied in the OSCE’s basic documents, including the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1999 Charter for European Security.

Our discussion in this session should concentrate on how to counter discrimination in the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation. In order to combat discrimination, we need to know exactly what it is. We need to know what it is, we need to know what causes it, and we need to know how it manifests itself.

As in any debate, the definitions may vary. Is it discrimination when universities treat applicants with the same grades but from different schools differently because one school has the reputation for giving good grades easily? Is it discrimination when a shop offers a discount to the elderly? Is it discrimination when a bank offers a special

type of bank account to young people? Is it discrimination when a company requires its workers to speak English at native level?

These are some questions that we may be able to consider during this morning's discussion. For my part, I would like to offer one *possible* definition of discrimination:

“Treating one person unfairly over another according to factors unrelated to their ability or potential.”

Yet on what grounds should one person be treated unfairly over another in such a situation? The European Union is committed to take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. This is a list of potential reasons for discrimination.

If we put these two elements together, we have the following definition:

“Treating one person unfairly over another based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.”

It is not my intention to offer a definitive definition of discrimination, simply to provide one *possible* definition for the sake of the discussion.

The advantage of setting definitions is that they allow us to consider how a phenomenon manifests itself. We are able to see that it is a manifestation of discrimination if a candidate is excluded from a job on the basis of his or her age while a younger candidate is accepted. It is a manifestation of discrimination if a foreigner with all the necessary skills and qualifications is prevented from attending university on the basis of his or her ethnic origin while a person of local origin is accepted. It is a manifestation of discrimination if a woman has to pay more for a haircut than a man with the same hairstyle on the basis of her sex.

Those of you who have listened carefully to what I have just said will have noted that I chose to use the words *manifestations of discrimination*. In doing so, I would like to make a distinction between *manifestations of discrimination* and a *mentality of discrimination*.

This distinction is not simply theoretical; it is also important for our discussion today. We are here to consider how to counter discrimination, but we should be aware that there is a difference between countering discrimination and countering manifestations of discrimination.

We counter manifestations of discrimination by introducing laws to punish this behaviour. If an employer who refuses to interview candidates on the basis of their ethnic origin is required to pay a fine for this behaviour, then we are countering a manifestation of discrimination, but we are not fighting the root cause of this behaviour itself.

We counter discrimination by changing mentalities. We counter discrimination by educating in particular our young people to be open to differences and to reject

discriminatory attitudes. If a child has the chance to participate in an exchange programme in another country or has the chance to learn to appreciate disabled or elderly people, or learns to value other humans, regardless of their sex, then we are helping to combat discrimination.

There is of course a link between these two actions. By combating manifestations of discrimination, we make it easier to combat the root cause of discrimination itself. For just as positive experiences help to overcome a mentality of discrimination, negative experiences will serve to strengthen this mentality, and this is what we need to counter.

The OSCE's role in our efforts to counter discrimination and manifestations of discrimination is that of a positive incubator. At the OSCE, we can learn from each other through the exchange of ideas and the presentation of best practices. We can also learn from experts, both from the OSCE and from other institutes that work in this field.

Seminars such as this one provide an ideal opportunity for an exchange of ideas and for the presentation of best practices between participating States. The opportunity to meet and share experiences should allow for greater mutual understanding and should improve the possibilities for practical cooperation.

The OSCE also provides a neutral forum for the Mediterranean Partners to enhance dialogue and cooperation, through the Contact Group and OSCE events. This forum provides the Partners with an opportunity to increase understanding and build confidence among and between the countries of the region. At the same time, the OSCE plays the role of a bridge linking Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

The OSCE has an extensive range of mechanisms designed to help its participating States achieve their goals. This expertise should serve not just the participating States, but also our Partners, and others who subscribe to our values and are interested in our way of doing things, which has been tried and tested over thirty years. It is in our interest to share with our friends and neighbours that thirty year heritage of making Europe a united and more stable continent.

One contribution to this heritage was the Handbook on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies in Countries of Origin and Destination, which was the result of cooperation between the OSCE, the International Organisation for Migration and the International Labour Office during the Slovenian Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2005. The Arabic translation of this handbook has been presented at this Seminar, and we hope that it will continue to be useful both in the European participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE has been concerned with issues of discrimination against migrants, against women and other forms of discrimination for a long time. We are all committed to countering all forms of discrimination, and we must remain committed to doing so.

I have offered one possible definition of discrimination. I have also suggested that there is a difference between countering discrimination and countering manifestations of discrimination. Finally, I have outlined the positive impact that the OSCE can have on our efforts to achieve our aim of countering discrimination.

I hope that these points will provide some food for thought for this morning's discussions. I look forward to a lively and helpful debate.