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Session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination: a way to mutual understanding and reinforcing positive attitudes

The OSCE Intolerance Conferences in 2004 – How to follow up?

I

The OSCE's approach to intolerance

The subject on which I am supposed to speak to you may give the impression that it is some OSCE internal matter. I am convinced it is not and this morning's debate has made it clear once more that, by its very nature, it is and should continue to be a priority matter for any dialogue with the Mediterranean partners.
In a very concrete way it should also be seen as an OSCE specific contribution to Near and Middle East problems.

When about two years back the OSCE decided to take up intolerance as one focal area of its future activities there were questions by some: why this subject? Is it fitting for an organization which deals with security and cooperation, primarily in a political context?

Time has proven since then that it is, and Germany has been among those OSCE delegations which from the very beginning have pleaded for a proactive role of our organization in this context. This morning's discussion has given ample evidence that intolerance and discrimination are not only a violation of human dignity but a threat to open and democratic societies and thereby to their stability. The OSCE strategy adopted last December by Ministers in Maastricht puts it in these terms "practices related to discrimination and intolerance… may give rise to wider-scale conflict and violence". These are lots of examples to prove this and these are all too obvious. There is agreement in the OSCE that all forms of intolerance and discrimination must be addressed. Nobody wants to establish hierarchies in this respect. Let us also be aware that intolerance and discrimination are increasingly a phenomenon which spread across borders. This is why international organizations like the OSCE have to deal with them.

In combating intolerance and discrimination we are well-advised to base ourselves on a holistic approach. But while we have to be very careful to develop integrative strategies and not to single out any phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination, a holistic

approach has to take into account that phenomena are different and in some cases may require special treatment.

This is certainly true of anti-Semitism. We can not close our eyes to the fact that in our day anti-Semitism is again raising its head. We owe it to ourselves and to the horrors caused by the Holocaust to combat it energetically and as a priority task. In this respect the OSCE Berlin Conference has laid a solid basis on which we now should build action. As all other forms of intolerance, anti-Semitism must be fought by all of us, not only by Jewish people, but also by Muslims, Christians and those of other faiths.

This is not ignoring other topical forms of intolerance. The Brussels conference revealed intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as another issue to be tackled. Remember Imam Sajid who shared with us the messages of the Qur'an on peace, tolerance and compassion, reminding most delegates that their knowledge in this area is poor and that better understanding of Islam might be another key to overcome prejudice and intolerance. There is agreement in the OSCE to take this up as a major challenge as well, and I can assure you for a country like mine which has 3,2 Million Muslims among its citizens, this is not a theoretical but a very practical question.

II

The declarations and decisions from the Maastricht OSCE Ministerial of December 2003 and of the Berlin, Paris and Brussels Conferences on intolerance provide for a comprehensive action program. The Conferences have also identified appropriate instruments.

We should now undertake a serious effort and proceed speedily to translating words into actions. The starting point must be data collection. All conferences identified collections as the most important basic tool. It is not an end in itself. Only exact data will allow policy makers – this includes Participating states as well as OSCE/ODIHR – to address problems in a targeted manner. Without data we will not be able to set up, review and refine our strategies and measures in the various fields identified for further actions.

Therefore, our first priority should be to set up structures to implement our commitments on data collection as a short-term goal. What is needed urgently for the purpose is a sound methodology. Here, ODIHR should take over a key role, It can build on achievements which have already been reached in the framework of EUMC (European Monitoring Center on Racism and Intolerance), where fifteen European States work together.

A second priority is education to tolerance. It is a cornerstone of preventive strategies. What we need is national action plans addressing education and encompassing the whole society: school curricula, teachers training, training of professionals, media, government officials, policy makers, law enforcement personnel. A focal point must be education in elementary and high schools because it is here that the young generation may be trained

for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. But education has to go beyond the school level reaching out to all sectors of society, strengthening the overall commitment to stand up for tolerance.

In that regard we have highlighted, in the Paris Conference, the importance of the Internet. We have acknowledged the potential of the Internet as a special tool to promote tolerance, not ignoring at the same time the vulnerability of young people to hate spread through the Internet.

Another important instrument to prevent intolerance and discrimination would be the promotion of dialogue at all levels of society. To that effect, we should envisage the creation or reactivation of fora for open, self critical and interactive relations within our societies. Dialogue should in particular be seen as an instrument to foster mutual respect as a two-way relationship, to help build down existing barriers.

Indispensable for an operational approach is cooperation and other international for a in particular with EUMC, ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance), UNCERD (United Nations Committee on Racism and Xenophobia) and ODIHR as set out in the Maastricht decision. A side event held in Brussels on this topic has shown to us that such cooperation is underway, however not fully achieved.

ODIHR will have to be developed into a pillar of an operational, implementation - orientated approach in the fight against intolerance and discrimination. A program on "tolerance and non-discrimination", as currently in the process of establishment, will bring together experts including those on legal matters. In total the program will consist of eight experts.

Another important instrument in this context is the OSCE Media Representative. Only a few days back, on 11 November, the OSCE Permanent Council has adopted, as a follow-up of Paris, a decision specifying i.a. his contribution to the implementation of tolerance. In particular his early warning function as Media watchdog will be of help to counter hate speech.

III

The upcoming Ministerial Council at Sofia is supposed to endorse the Berlin and Brussels decisions as well as the outcome of Paris. It will thus provide for a concrete and realistic set of taskers which can serve as a policy line to Participating states as well as the OSCE as such. And in particular to ODIHR. Let me add that we will be among those in the OSCE who will work for a strong para on intolerance in a Declaration adopted by the Sofia Ministerial.

Looking beyond Sofia, we have to keep the momentum. While 2005 is supposed to be primarily a year of implementation, this should not mean less political attention or

commitments. Here the creation of Special Representatives comes in as an important step to keep the momentum and to add visibility to our efforts. Their main task will be to keep up public awareness at a high political level and to assist ODIHR in consolidating the tolerance program. As the result of a long internal debate it seems now that we will have three special representatives: one for anti-Semitism, another on fighting discrimination against Muslims and a third one for other important aspects regarding racism, xenophobia and discrimination. The mandates of the three Special Representatives are currently worked out. It seems the CIO of the OSCE will subsequently proceed to their appointment.

Intolerance and the fight against all its manifestations will be again the center of OSCE's attention when we proceed to a conference which, at the invitation of the Spanish government, is planned to be held in Cordoba in early June of 2005. Cordoba itself stands as a symbol for the shared Islamic – Christian - Judeo heritage of Europe. There is agreement as of now that Cordoba should deal in particular with implementation issues which by no means should preclude that it is designed as a conference of high political profile.

We will have to discuss these issues in further detail, and it goes without saying that, at every stage, we are interested to maintain a close substantive dialogue with our Mediterranean Partners of Cooperation.