

OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Tirana, Albania

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for giving me the floor,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Ukrainian Chairmanship in Office for putting this subject of tremendous importance at the forefront of its Chairmanship year. I would further like to extend my thanks to the Albanian authorities for their kind and generous decision to host this High Level Conference. Choosing Albania to host this event is no coincidence; while taking note of the fact that Albania celebrated 100 years of religious tolerance last year, I would like to highlight that Albania has long been considered an example of co-existence in terms of religion and culture. This conference is yet another excellent opportunity for us to discuss the progresses made in this regard in the OSCE area, bringing up the shortcomings and exchange good practices

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has always placed a special emphasis on combatting discrimination and promoting tolerance. Addressing this issue is essential for the promotion of security in our region. A number of meetings, conferences and seminars have also been previously organized where relevant recommendations, policies, measures were jointly adopted by the parliamentarians. The most recent example is a Resolution adopted last year on “addressing racism and xenophobia affecting people of African descent in the OSCE region”. A compilation of those documents has been printed and is available to the participants together with the other working documents of this conference. Most of what I will say next is based on these documents and on the PA’s work in the area.

Using this opportunity, I would also like to state that despite the progress made, the OSCE region still remains vulnerable to intolerant behavior and discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity and gender. There is especially a growing prevalence of anti-Semitic, racist materials in Internet. In this regard, we urge the participating States to increase their efforts to counter the spread of anti-Semitic and racist content in Internet and TV within the framework of their respective national legislation or through the adoption of new legislature which must of course be in accordance with OSCE commitments on the freedom of expression. The same emphasis needs to be put on all efforts to fight other forms of discrimination, including anti-Muslim and anti-Christian manifestations.

Thus, the adoption of legislative measures has to be carried out in a very careful manner. We do witness sometimes, that legislative acts of some participating states tend to violate and limit the rights of individuals belonging to a certain minority religious group. In this regard, we would like to call upon parliamentarians and the participating States to ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice any religion or belief, alone or in community with others, through transparent and non-discriminatory laws, regulations, practices and policies, and to remove any registration or recognition policies that discriminate against any religious community and hinder its ability to operate freely and equally with other faiths.

Furthermore, I would also like to stress the importance of the second part of our conference which will deal with an important role of youth education in combatting discrimination and fostering mutual understanding and tolerance. In this regard, I would like to encourage the participating states to focus more on the greater role that teenagers and young adults can play in combatting prejudices and forms of intolerance and call on them to jointly promote initiatives to teach the youth about the greatness of diversity. These activities can come in the form of trainings, seminars and workshops, where the representatives of different religious, ethnic groups can sit together to learn and foster mutual understanding. Educational efforts throughout the OSCE region must be encouraged with an aim of countering discriminatory stereotypes and attitudes among younger people, to increase Holocaust awareness programs, and to identify necessary resources to accomplish these goals.

Using this opportunity, I would also like to appreciate the ongoing efforts undertaken by the OSCE and ODIHR through its Programme on Tolerance and Non-discrimination and express our support to the continued organisation of expert meetings on all forms of intolerance aimed at enhancing the implementation of relevant OSCE commitments. We also like to once again remind the participating States to improve methods of monitoring and to report anti-Semitic as well as racist incidents and other hate crimes to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in a timely manner.

I would like to thank you all once again for convening and participating in this High Level Conference addressing an important topic for all of us. I wish everyone fruitful and constructive discussions over the next couple of days.

Thank you Mr. Chairman