



Address
by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia Dr Dimitrij Rupel
at the OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism, Berlin, 28 April 2004

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Slovenia welcomes the fact that the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism is held today in Berlin.

The Special Meeting on the relationship between racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the internet and hate crimes, which will take place in Paris in June, and the autumn Brussels Conference on "Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination", are two further important events related to this topic. All three events will certainly add value to the Decision of the Ministerial Council in Maastricht on Tolerance and Non-discrimination.

The Republic of Slovenia is aware of the importance of these issues and will continue to promote tolerance and non-discrimination in all fields in accordance with the above-mentioned Decision. The well-regulated area of inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-linguistic, inter-religious and inter-racial relations is of exceptional importance for my government and my country Slovenia. Due to specific historical circumstances and its geographical position at the European cultural, religious and ethnic crossroads, Slovenia is home to a number of different national, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Our model of regulating the status of ethnic and religious communities has been recognised and appreciated by various international fora, but there is always room for improvement.

We should be aware that there is no uniform European or world approach to regulating relations between the state, ethnic and religious communities. Apart from respecting fundamental human rights, models differ above all because of the historical and cultural circumstances of each individual state. Following its independence, Slovenia's constitutional system has been based on the separation of the state and church, on freedom of religion and belief and the principle of equality of all religious communities. We consider the implementation of constitutional principles in everyday life and strengthening of the culture of tolerance and dialogue in Slovenian society to be the priority in this field.

The right of an individual to free expression of religion in private and public life is understood in the context of the category of freedom of conscience as well as of the collective rights exercised by religious communities or groups. The latter are legal entities under private law, if, in compliance with the 1976 Legal Status of Religious Communities Act, they are registered with the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Religious Communities.

The Jewish Community of Slovenia is the sole official representative of Slovene Jewry recognized by state authorities. It has been registered since 1976, but became really active only some years after Slovenia's independence. The Jewish Community of Slovenia and is active in five Slovenian municipalities.

According to the estimations of the President of the Jewish Community, there are around 400 - 600 Jews living in Slovenia out of a total population of 2 million, but in the last census only 300

persons (0,015 %) declared themselves as Jews. The gravest problem is the age distribution, with the number of elderly members rising constantly.

As I have mentioned, the principles of non-discrimination and equality are the general constitutional principles, and all the laws should be by definition in compliance with them. Therefore there is no specific anti-Semitic legislation in Slovenia. The Criminal Code prohibits genocide, actions and crimes on the basis of discrimination according to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious and political beliefs, hate crimes.

In trying to establish whether and to what extent Slovenia or any country can resist anti-Semitism, the most appropriate question one should ask would probably be the following: What are we doing to be more open to the sensitivities of minorities including the Jewish community? The best answers to such questions can be found in everyday life. No violent anti-Semitic acts by authorities or by the media have been reported in Slovenia. There has also been no court case or charge for a criminal act, connected with anti-Semitism. It has to be stressed that cases of radical, classical negation of the Holocaust are not detectable in Slovenian public discourses. Slovenian public school textbooks present the Holocaust adequately.

Today's Conference raises the profile of the problem in the public eye and increases awareness of anti-Semitism. We must never forget what happened in 1930s and 1940s, because remembering the past is a way of ensuring that such terrible events never recur. Anti-Semitic acts must be dealt with severely and the rights of all minorities must be safeguarded.

The Republic of Slovenia believes that this Conference will be successful and will contribute to better understanding of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.

Thank you.