



High-level conference Tolerance trumps hate 8 May 2015, Brussels draft Chair conclusions

12 mai 2015, 14:47

Mr. Secretary General, dear colleagues, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank colleagues, representatives and delegates of the Member States of the Council of Europe and of its Observer States who have come together with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and with high level representatives of International Organizations and experts active in the field of Human Rights, for constructive discussions here in Brussels on 8th of May 2015.

We have exchanged views with representatives of governments, civil society, youth and media and together we have reflected on the root causes of the worrying trends of polarization in our societies, leading to extremism. The violence we have suffered in Europe but also in our near neighbourhood requires a response which does not divide us but allows us to live together in a more tolerant and inclusive society.

Today we gained better understanding of the multiple causes of hate and extremism and we are convinced that only a multidimensional approach will bring us closer to a solution. The input by youth representatives was an essential element in our discussions. We must listen to future generations and ensure effective follow up. Other actors are also part of the solution. Regional and local authorities are close to citizens and their problems. Media contribute to the world view of citizens. Educators shape the skills of our youth. Social workers measure the pulse of fragile groups. Sports leaders provide models of accomplishment. Religious leaders provide spiritual leadership for many. And let us not forget the crucial role of families in transferring values. One of the conclusions of our meeting today is the added value of bringing those very different groups together. Having this multiple input today creates a common platform and shows us the way forward, how to break through barriers of negative interpretations of nationalism, religion and ethnicity in order to create a global network dedicated to ending violent extremism.

The Council of Europe has the instruments for a response. The Conference today confirmed our commitment to both the legal instruments of the Council and its well-functioning institutions and our engagement to cooperate with them.

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe promotes respect for Human Rights and helps Member states to promote, respect and realize the rights of which the Council of Europe is a guardian. He promotes Human Rights education and enhances protection of vulnerable groups and minorities. He detects insufficiencies in law and practice in Member states and thus confronts of fundamental causes of radicalization and extremism.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) provides counsel to Member states how to confront racism and intolerance. It monitors access to education, employment, housing, health and other services of vulnerable groups. ECRI looks into the tone of political and public debate on those vulnerable groups.

The jurisprudence of the European Court for Human Rights brings us the necessary balance between universal principles which emanate from the Convention on the one hand and culture and traditions in our more and more diverse societies on the other hand. Their judgements on hate speech carefully differentiate between true and serious incitement to extremism - which we shall not tolerate - and the right of individuals to express their opinions and thus to offend, shock and perturb others. The Court thus helps us to oppose mounting intolerance while respecting fundamental liberties, including freedom of expression and respect for privacy.

Good practices at an international and national level were mentioned here and will be part of the Council of Europe and its Member states actions to battle clichés and discrimination and to avoid exclusion of citizens from our societies. Let me mention some :

Quality and independent journalism needs to be paralleled by the empowerment of users of digital communications. Users need to know their rights online, how to recognize online rumor, how to combat online hate speech and how to react against media who abuse the "business model of intolerance" to attract attention. Media are encouraged to ensure better and fair representation of members of minority and vulnerable groups in their programs. We welcome the continuation of the Council of Europe youth campaign to combat hate speech online and now also offline. We are committed to intensify on a national basis our efforts to make progress on this path towards positive communication on the diversity in our societies.

In the field of education, learning-tools for democratic citizenship, intercultural education and history teaching are key instruments to battle extremism. The adoption of the Council of Europe by the end of 2015 of a competence framework for the exercise of democratic citizenship will add to the tools already available to schools and teachers and we have today also noted the fundamental role of families in promoting tolerance through education.

We need a long term and coherent commitment of governments to the values we seek to promote through to the No Hate Speech Movement, particularly in formal and non-formal education mechanisms. It is essential that all educators, including families, share the same values.

Both promotion of diversity in our economies and fighting discrimination in recruitment and on the work floor as well as on the housing market is a major factor in boosting harmonious social relations. In recognizing our own bias we can act effectively to have an inclusive society.

In preventing violent extremism, close local cooperation between police, schools and social services is crucial with close involvement of parents and other actors in youth development.

Good prison management, including mentoring, preparation for release and post-release supervision are preventive measures against radicalization in prisons.

Finally in developing our alternative answer to hate speech we shall not just denounce extremist or radical thinking but will provide alternative and progressive interpretations, bust myths, refute through counter-examples, discredit rumors and highlight the risks linked to violence. Social media can be a strong asset in bringing our positive message.

Our sports and culture champions - whether in the stadium or outside the sports arena - provide role models for our youth. Their stand against extremism is the best possible counter narrative. Sports by definition is not political and is thus a legitimate way to carry a message of tolerance.

Against this background we look forward to the approval of a Plan of Action covering the medium and long term (2015-2017) to combat extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism here in Brussels at the end of this month at the ministerial meeting which concludes the Belgian chairmanship. A plan that will strengthen our legal instruments and prevent radicalization through practical measures promoting our values in schools, prisons, vulnerable neighbourhoods and on the Internet.

Let me conclude on a more personal note. We started our meeting with a minute of silence on this important day, when we commemorate the end of a terrible conflict in Europe which was the heart of the "raison d'être" of the Council of Europe. Let me in that context conclude by mentioning what is for me one of the most important remarks made this morning. That is the need for all of us to promote civil courage. Civil courage is the courage to stand up for our common values allowing us to live together in a spirit of tolerance and peace.

About this conference

Concept note: www.tolerance-conference.be/docs/conceptnote-en.pdf

Programme: www.tolerance-conference.be/docs/Programme_EN.pdf

Participants list: www.tolerance-conference.be/docs/Participants_08052015.pdf