



Role of inter-parliamentary diplomacy in promoting inter-faith tolerance

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Dear Mr. Speaker,
Honourable colleagues,

It is a real honour and pleasure for me, as Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Representative for Central and Eastern Asia, to participate in this international conference “Religions against Terrorism.” I would like to express my warm thanks to the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan for organizing this important event, for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to speak about the role of inter-parliamentary diplomacy in promoting inter-faith tolerance.

The OSCE is home to 57 participating States – 57 States that differ in sizes and interests, in economic and military strength. The OSCE is home to more than one billion people between Vancouver and Vladivostok, who also differ in language, in culture, in tradition and religion.

These differences between States, peoples, culture and religions can easily lead to conflicts and war. And sadly enough we can find many tragic examples in our history and even in our present.

But we also know that diversity does not have to be an obstacle for peace and stability. On the contrary, we can find much proof that diversity can be an invaluable promoter of development, wealth and content and a rich cultural expression – if we respect the interests, ideas and beliefs of others, learn about their points of view and search for co-operation.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the aim and the purpose of the OSCE. This is the overarching objective of its Parliamentary Assembly, namely to foster dialogue, to build bridges and to create the necessary environment for successful co-operation between our nations and people.

I myself am an ardent believer in the role of inter-parliamentary diplomacy. And promoting understanding and tolerance between religions and supporting inter-faith co-operation has always played a constant and very important role for our work at the OSCE.

Last year for example, OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier was here in Astana at the Fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. He spoke on inter-faith dialogue and especially underlined the OSCE's efforts in boosting effective counter-narratives to radicalization.

For this purpose, the OSCE has appointed three personal representatives, Mr. Bülent Şenay, Mr. Vladislav Grib and Rabbi Andrew Baker who work constantly on inter-faith issues, such as discrimination, intolerance and anti-Semitism.

The Parliamentary Assembly itself has become a great platform to support interreligious dialogue and to discuss issues stemming from inter-faith relations. This is possible because the Assembly is a unique place, where we, the elected representatives of over one billion people, from 57 different countries with all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds can come together. It is an international place where we can gain access to knowledge and experience beyond the scope of our domestic politics – knowledge which we then can take back home with us to inform our colleagues and citizens.

This is why we, as parliamentarians, can and should contribute greatly to promoting inter-faith dialogue in support of comprehensive security in the OSCE region. And we invite the participating States to tap into our resources and to use them.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Today our co-operation is more important than ever. In a time when groups of violent extremists try to misuse religious beliefs to justify their terrorist attacks, when they try to divide our countries and societies along religious lines, when growing numbers of our youth turn their backs on our political systems in disappointment, when young people hope to find solutions to their social and economic problems within extremism and violence instead, when armed conflicts arise everywhere – even within the OSCE area – and when competing agendas and hostile rhetoric often threaten to replace productive dialogues and co-operation among our participating States, in such a time it becomes quite obvious: The level of peace, freedom and stability that we have already achieved within the OSCE area cannot be taken for granted.

We constantly need to stand up for it and maintain it – if we don't want to lose it again. But let me stress one point: Only together we can win the fight.

And our message must be clearer than ever: Diversity and respect for multi-confessionality are cornerstones of our countries' histories and identities. Diversity and respect for multi-confessionality are preconditions for peace, stability and growing prosperity within the OSCE region.

Terrorism, however, is a crime – a crime that has no justification, and it should not be associated with any race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.

To underscore that we at the OSCE stand together when facing those problems, the campaign "OSCE United in Countering Violent Extremism" was launched. It is all our duty to respond to violent extremism by promoting tolerance, mutual respect, pluralism, inclusion, and cohesion. And we have to take care to include everyone in our fight.

Here I also want to stress the role of women who are often forgotten when it comes to security policy. Research shows that peacekeeping and peacebuilding is less efficient without women. But if we want to teach tolerance to prevent terrorism, if we want to keep our young people from becoming foreign fighters, it is women who are our most valuable partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a lot of work to do. Thank you for bringing us together today to discuss this important topic. I wish us all a successful conference and an interesting discussion.

Thank you!