



Keynote speech
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“Parliamentarians and their role in promoting tolerance and wiping out hate”

At the UNITED Conference “Wipe out Hate – UNITED in Solidarity”
26th October 2013, near Prague (Czech Republic)

PARTICIPANTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It is firstly my honour on behalf of the Committee on Migration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take part in the opening of this conference.

It is secondly my pleasure to be involved in the Conference with such a strong network of organisations and individuals working to wipe out hate and discrimination across Europe.

As most of you will be aware, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe represents Parliamentarians from 47 European countries, going beyond the boundaries of the European Union as far as Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As a parliamentarian I have a double mandate, both as a national Parliamentarian in Finland and also as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe has often been called “the conscience of Europe” or “Europe’s human rights watch-dog”. These are titles for which it is proud.

However, a conscience without action is worth little, and therefore it is the work of Parliamentarians to bring about change, in much the same way as you, civil activists, can bring about change.

Your conference over the next four days is not just about important themes :

- the perception of migrants in society
- the rise in populism
- or the impact of the economic crisis

It is also about change in these areas, and how to bring them about.

Parliamentarians have a role in promoting tolerance and wiping out hate, but how are they to bring this about?

In this opening I would like to highlight 5 imperatives for parliamentarians, as a contribution to the Conference.

The first is that Parliamentarians have a duty to lead and not just follow the people.

- This can require bravery and may be essential when dealing with issues of migrants in particular during this period of economic crisis.
- The case of Leonarda, the young Roma girl who was expelled from France after being taken off a school bus, can be used as an example of this.
 - o The public would in general be in favour of the expulsion of irregular migrants
 - o But, politicians need to stand up when necessary – in this case because of the way in which the expulsion took place (the girl taken off a school bus) and because the 15 year old girl was sent back to Kosovo, a place she had never been brought up in

The second is that Parliamentarians are involved in bringing about changes in legislation and practice

Europe has made great gains in legislation against racism and intolerance. Before the year 2000 only 6 EU countries had dedicated anti-racism laws, whereas now most countries have them, in a large part because of EU legislation and activities of Council of Europe monitoring bodies such as ECRI (European Committee Against Racism and Intolerance).

However, lack of political will and lack of funding, have not allowed practice to follow the gains made in laws.

A quantum leap is required in many countries.

We have seen this happen in some countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, the killing and subsequent investigation following the death of Stephen Lawrence brought about a radical change in thinking in the United Kingdom. It led to recognition of institutional racism in the United Kingdom.

More countries in Europe need to recognise that they also need to face up to "institutional racism".

The third imperative for parliamentarians is to tackle the root causes of hate. Integration policies should involve both migrants and their host communities.

Comments by leading politicians back in 2010 that "multiculturalism had failed" have not helped the debate, but they have shown even more clearly the need to invest more heavily in integration.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe has reacted to these statements by preparing a report on "Living together – combining diversity and freedom in 21st Century Europe". This was prepared by a group of Eminent Persons.

It not only identifies the threats to Europe of a fear of diversity but also the responses necessary. So, in a broad way, this report mirrors what this Conference is seeking to do, and I strongly urge you to use this report in your work.

My fourth message is that parliamentarians have a particular duty during election campaigns.

The Assembly has noted in its Resolution 1889 (2010) on the portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns that “some candidates and political parties habitually present migrants and refugees as a threat to and a burden on society, which increases negative reactions among the public to immigration and immigrants.”

This not only increases manifestations of xenophobia, but also facilitates the rise of xenophobic populist parties - such as Golden Dawn in Greece.

Most of us will participate as voters or candidates in the EU elections in May and June 2014. Turnover in EU elections has always been quite low and this will probably continue as the economic crisis has increased the unpopularity of the EU. This is an opportunity for EU sceptic parties to gain seats. But we must be careful not to be confused by their messages. Some of these parties also have xenophobic agendas, and by giving them the power we might hamper our work against hate speech.

I therefore call on political leaders to assume their responsibilities during debates on migration issues and to combat xenophobic rhetoric and ideology.

Media also have a responsibility in this and in particular to use factually correct material with fair formulations.

In fact, the Council of Europe has initiated the No Hate Speech Movement as a tool against fear and discrimination online. Parliamentarians must be media and internet literate especially as the Internet offers unlimited space for self-expression and creating links between people who want to engage in the Anti-discrimination movements. I am happy that Mr Laszlo Foldi will be presenting to you tomorrow afternoon the objectives and realms of this necessary project.

My fifth and final message is that we have to find new solutions for dealing with the issue of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The boat disaster off the Island of Lampedusa a month ago in which over 300 persons lost their lives, was a wake-up call to politicians across Europe that the fortress policies of Europe are not working and are not humane.

Unfortunately this is not an isolate case. Let me also mention

- The failure of the Dublin agreements (on returns)
- Recent decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in relation to Italian “push backs” or returns to Greece
- The Parliamentary Assembly’s report on “Lives Lost in the Mediterranean”, an incident in which 63 persons were left to die in a boat floating between Italy and Libya.

Major changes are necessary, going well beyond what the European Union has been able to put together in the so-called Common European Asylum System.

It is clear though that a comprehensive plan of action is required involving countries of origin, transit and destination. Irregular migration will not cease, and solutions will be needed for those without papers in Europe. Certainly many will need to be returned in a humane way (preferring voluntary returns) but, there will be many who cannot be returned, and countries will have to consider ways of regularising their situation. Our Assembly takes a clear position on this in Resolution 1568 (2007) on regularisation programmes for irregular migrants.

PARTICIPANTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I have tried to provide you with a number of elements for discussion.

Within the Parliamentary Assembly your work is important not only for my Committee on Migration but also for other Committees dealing directly with Equality and Non-Discrimination, Human Rights and Legal Affairs.

I hope to make individual contact with some of you while I am still here today, and I wish you a fruitful conference over the next four days.

Thank you.