

3rd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue
“Sharing culture for sharing security”
Baku, 19 May 2015

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I have the privilege of addressing this distinguished audience as one of the last speakers of this 3rd plenary session devoted to the responsibility of international institutions and governments in building trust and understanding between cultures and civilizations and shaping common global agenda.

I am grateful for this as we are indeed discussing issues which are increasingly important on the global agenda, as President Ilham Aliyev rightly pointed out in his opening speech yesterday morning.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the organizers of this 3rd Baku World Forum for inviting the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to join this discussion, and asking me to say a few words - as the current OSCE Head of Mission and Project Co-ordinator in Baku, but also on behalf of the OSCE Secretary General, who unfortunately couldn't make it this year.

First, allow me, as other participants did yesterday, to pick up on the title of this year's edition of the Baku World Forum : “Sharing

culture for sharing security”. I think this title is very appropriate - not in the sense that we do not see the challenges posed to security by the lack of intercultural or interfaith dialogue, the rise of intolerance, discrimination or violence based on race or religion.

These challenges were discussed at length yesterday. They are indeed global, they are also faced by well-established democracies of Western Europe, which previously thought that they had put these problems behind them after the end of the World War II. The terrorist attacks against the journalists and cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo, but also against the Kosher supermarket in Paris (where 4 people were killed just because they were Jewish), as well as the recently planned attacks on Churches or on Mosques, are still very fresh on our minds.

As a matter of fact already, we heard yesterday Rabbi Baker telling us about the growing insecurity faced by Jewish communities in France or in Belgium, with more and more people thinking of possible emigration, not just because of the terrorist attacks, but also because basic things of everyday life – like sending children to school – have become more and more difficult, as these communities face growing discrimination in society, no matter how many efforts Governments would make to try and combat these phenomena. The rise of anti-Semitism, Christianophobia, often associated with violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism on the one hand, the rise of xenophobia, islamophobia and of the far right on the other hand, have a destructive potential for many of our societies in the OSCE area, in places “West of Vienna”, but also actually worldwide – it is definitely a major

security challenge that we are facing and it is our collective responsibility to try and do something about it, before it is too late.

So what is it that international organizations and governments can do about it ? What can an organization like the OSCE do about it?

An organization that takes pride in being the largest regional security organization under the UN Charter, and believes that it was instrumental in helping overcome the legacy and the divide of the Cold War (this year we will celebrate the 40 th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act signed in 1975).

And an organization that is still trying to play a significant role in conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution on the European continent. Everybody has heard here about structures such as the OSCE Minsk Group, that has been trying for many years now to bring about a peaceful settlement of the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh ; and of the organization's efforts to prevent the conflict unfolding now in Ukraine, where OSCE monitors play a leading role, from getting out of hand.

Apart from those immediate priorities, what role can the OSCE play in addressing the perhaps even more important challenges that we are discussing here, in trying to prevent the clash of civilizations becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy ?

It is clear to me that international organizations need to join efforts in supporting voices of moderation, promoting dialogue and restoring trust. One of the ways of doing is through participation in

fora like this one, and I want to commend once again the Government of Azerbaijan for taking this brilliant initiative.

Inter-cultural dialogue, as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures, should in my view not only lead to a deeper understanding of the other, but also include conflict prevention and de-escalation, combating prejudices and stereotypes in the public and political discourse and facilitate coalition-building across diverse cultural and religious communities.

The OSCE is a platform where 57 participating States share common values, but at the same time it's the venue where new common values are forged through dialogue and mutual understanding. I believe that Azerbaijan, through sharing its best practices with other OSCE participating States and their civil societies, can make, and actually, is already making a significant contribution in order to decrease tensions in other parts of the world, promoting values of respect, religious tolerance and non-discrimination. So yes, it is very much about shared security.

The OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security and co-operation, is uniquely equipped to address these challenges, and can provide a platform for participating States to learn from each other's experience. The OSCE has been active in promoting initiatives and creating platforms for many different forms of dialogue at various levels as a means of countering

misperceptions, decreasing tensions, preventing conflict and promoting stability across the OSCE area.

Since 2004 in Sofia, the OSCE Chairman in Office has appointed 3 Special Representatives, repeatedly reappointed since then, on Combatting Anti-Semitism; on Combatting Islamophobia; and on Combatting discriminations against Christians, racism and other forms of discrimination. An action plan on combatting anti-Semitism was adopted the same year, in 2004, and was recently reaffirmed at a high-level conference in Berlin in November 2014, as there is a growing understanding that more needs to be done.

Dialogue is vitally important, of course, but whatever we discuss has to translate then into policy if we want to impact reality. International organizations have an important role to play here in fostering more international co-operation between states, which remain the primary actors.

Under the Politico-military dimension, the OSCE offers a platform for participating States to share their experience and good practices in combatting terrorism, fighting violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism. I see that there is a need for more and more cooperation on issues of radicalization and de-radicalization, that are becoming more and more of a common problem. OSCE could be used as a very good tool for that, as it is one of the few international

organizations that actually, as a security organization, can bring added value in this area.

Under the Human dimension, at the same time, the OSCE has supported participating States in implementing jointly agreed commitments to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. The focus of OSCE activities has been on legislation, law enforcement, education, media, migration and integration, religious freedom, inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, as we believe we need to work on all this simultaneously.

In conclusion, I would like to wish us success. International organizations, just like government structures, cannot achieve success without the help and support of civil society, i.e. of ordinary people. For, as Edmund Burke was putting it, “all it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing”.

I think conferences like this one have the virtue of mobilizing people of good will globally, to make their voice heard as a force for moderation, mutual understanding and respect. This will result in more security for all of us.

Once again, thanks to all the organizers, and to the Government of Azerbaijan for taking the initiative and thank you for your attention.