

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, NON-DISCRIMINATION AND THE PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING LGBTI

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

The European Parliament, the European Commission and the Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU, organisers of this conference, recalling the international human rights standards set forth in, among others, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations human rights instruments:

- Underline that respect for fundamental rights, non-discrimination and the protection of vulnerable groups including LGBTI is an important element in the political criteria for membership of the EU.
- Recall that respect for fundamental rights and the values on which the EU is built is at the heart of the enlargement process; and that this conference is motivated by the will of the three EU institutions to continue moving ahead with the enlargement process.
- Stress that countries aspiring to join the EU need to show tangible results in decreasing risks for exclusion and threats to the integrity and dignity of all persons and to ensure that fundamental rights are upheld in law and in practice.

This conference has shown that:

- Enlargement countries have put in place key elements of the legal and policy framework for fundamental rights and non-discrimination and in demonstrating commitment to making progress in these areas. This progress was welcome by all participants.
- All minorities and vulnerable groups nonetheless often remain at risk of discrimination, marginalization or even violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey.
- Governments and political leaders of the region need to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring that all minorities and vulnerable groups, including LGBTI, are accepted and can participate freely in society. To that end, they need to adopt a comprehensive approach to inclusion of all minorities and vulnerable groups, including LGBTI. It is important to ensure that inclusion is addressed in all government policy documents (mainstreaming). Priority actions also need to be identified in key policy areas such health, education, public administration reform & police. These must include measurable benchmarks to ensure implementation.
- Inclusion of measurable benchmarks in all legislative and policy tools is necessary to ensure their robust implementation.
- Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity should be prohibited in law and measures taken to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can equally exercise their rights. Sustained efforts are needed to implement and enforce relevant

legislation and policies and to address pending reforms. A hierarchy of grounds must be avoided and multiple forms of discrimination must be addressed specifically.

- A general culture of respect for diversity and acceptance of minorities needs to be encouraged and societal intolerance, prejudice and hostility countered, through education, broad public debates and awareness raising, presenting positive images.
- Efforts are necessary to ensure cases of violence, hate speech and discrimination are brought to attention and that these receive adequate police and judicial follow-up and sanctioning. Cultural traditions must not be used as an excuse for condoning discrimination.
- Parliaments, Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society have a key role to play in the protection of human rights and the promotion of tolerant and respectful democratic societies.
- The media also has an important contribution to make towards breaking stereotypes and changing societal attitudes. The distribution of films and documentaries which encourage tolerance and understanding, such as 'Parada' or 'My Child', whose director / initiator attended the conference, are encouraged in this context.
- The existence of an enabling environment, where non-state actors such as NGOs and the media can operate freely and where freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed, is a key indicator of the democratic credentials of a country.

It was therefore concluded that:

- Progress in these areas will contribute to progress overall on the EU path.
- The European Commission and the European Parliament together with EU Member States will continue to pay close attention to developments in these fields and support efforts and positive developments wherever possible.