

## **Final Speech at the Conference on 'Combating Hate Crime in the EU: Giving Victims a Face and a Voice'**

*Check against Delivery*

Dear participants,

Let me remind you of the words of the remarkable Mahatma Gandhi, who said that 'a nation's greatness is measured by the way it treats its weakest members'. The European Union is based on certain fundamental values and the principle of the rule of law. These essential values have been converted into legal obligations so that human rights' obligations are fully respected. Despite all this, we still witness intolerance in our societies and crimes against other persons based on the mere fact that someone is 'different'.

I welcome the fact that Lithuania, in its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, has placed particular focus on the protection of human rights and plans to prepare the draft Council conclusions on combating hate crime, which we expect to adopt in December at the Justice and Home Affairs Council. The discussions and insights arising from this conference will greatly contribute to the drafting of those conclusions. We are also looking forward to the Commission report on the review of the Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia through criminal law, which was adopted on 28 November 2008.

This conference has mainly focused on the victims, those who have suffered crimes. Today we discussed not only about the current situation in combating hate crimes, but also, which is no less important, about ways of reacting to such crimes (namely, legal measures, but also education) and what improvements are needed. Moreover, we considered new challenges arising from modern society, such as manifestations of hate on the internet and other related issues.

At the same time, we kept an eye on the wider context, in so far as hate crimes threaten society or certain parts of it. Clearly, we must learn lessons from the past, when human dignity was denied through intolerance, discrimination and hatred targeted at those who were deemed 'different'; we must learn also from our history where ideologies preaching hate ended in human tragedies committed against a particular nation or groups of persons characterised as being 'different'.

We should remember that combating hate crimes is not just a question for our public authorities. The support and input of all members of society, and of academia, is extremely important. As a result, events and discussions such as those held today are absolutely essential. The discussions during this conference have shown that we are ready to face up to our shortcomings, we don't conceal them; we view the challenges, we try to tackle them and move forward.

For all these reasons, let me thank you once again for attending and participating in this ground-breaking two-day conference.

Thank you for your attention.