

**Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

I am glad to welcome you to this working party devoted to a very important subject.

The fight against hate crime is a sensitive and relevant issue in today's society. In light of the recent tragic events in Paris, we realize it is important to strengthen the protection of the right to freedom of expression.

The right to freedom of expression is one of the core elements of a democratic and legitimate state. However, it is necessary to note that this freedom can be limited if it conflicts with other human rights, for example, the right to life, respect for private and family life or the freedom of thought, conscience and religion (to mention some).

The limitation of the freedom of expression is spelled out in the European Union and international legal instruments, such as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. According to Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, human dignity shall be inviolable. It must be respected and protected.

We all have the right to live in a society where person's rights are respected and tolerated. Hate crime is the most serious form of manifestation of hate. Hate crime is a threat to national security, public safety and the rights and freedoms of citizens. Incitement to national, ethnic, racial or any other hatred, including in mass media, can result in serious and harmful consequences. The damage is even bigger if such acts of hate crime are not recorded and investigated properly - that might cause direct threats to public safety. Therefore, strengthening the fight against hate crime, including the prevention

of violence or threats of violence targeted at different social groups of society, especially if it causes moral, material or physical harm, is important.

We need to acknowledge that due to different historical and cultural backgrounds, the European Union Member States might have different understanding on the best instruments to fight human rights violations; therefore it can be hard to find the one and only right solution to fight hate crime in the European Union.

Beyond any doubt the fight against hate crime should be continued; it should be based on principles stated in documents adopted by various international organizations. In this respect the work done by the Fundamental Rights Agency and the Council of the European Union, case law of the European Court of Human Rights and findings of the Council of Europe are important to ensure solid legal ground in the fight against hate crime.

That being said, we need to work hard to implement an anti – hate crime policy in practice. The European Union needs to focus its policy to ensure that our efforts bring tangible results: possible hate crimes are reported, investigated and the guilty persons are brought to justice. In order to achieve these objectives, I wish this working party to develop a system that would encourage citizens to report hate crime incidents to the police and to create effective instruments to promote cooperation on a national and international level!

Thank you for your attention!