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**COMMITTEE FOR LEGAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

**REPORT\***

**“The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in the  
Fight against Hate Speech”**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Intercultural dialogue and tolerance are of utmost importance in the development of relations in today's diverse and interconnected world. The rapid development of the World Wide Web, universal access to global communication, increased use of social networking, as well as the simplification of transportation around the world have made people more interconnected. Intercultural links among different nations encourages respect for differences, dialogue and tolerance, and helps transform the existing differences into interaction. The rapid exchange of information opens up vast opportunities for people anywhere in the world, but also creates certain risks, as malicious content becomes available along with useful information. Today, there is a gradual decrease in tolerance among people in the world that heightens mistrust, increases tension and triggers hatred and hate speech.
2. Given these trends, it is important to preserve and enhance the culture of cooperation and dialogue in order to build a harmonious and interconnected world, as envisaged by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, the role of national parliaments and parliamentary organizations is increasing in shaping public thinking that contributes to the creation of a truly inclusive and tolerant society. Strengthening cultural ties and tolerance promotes friendly communication, smoothing out potential crises arising from differences, and harmonizing the international climate to combat hatred and hate speech.
3. The dialogue of cultures in international relations has become a particularly pressing topic of international discussions in recent years. Given this development, the Sixty-Second Meeting of the Committee decided to take up the topic “The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in the Fight against Hate Speech” with a view to elaborate the Report and the Recommendation to be submitted to the spring Sixty-Third Plenary Session of the PABSEC General Assembly in Tirana in May 2024.
4. The present Report uses the contributions of the following national delegations: the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, and Republic of Türkiye. At the same time, the reference material was obtained from various online sources and official sites of international organisations.

## II. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HATE SPEECH

5. Every year on 18 June, the world celebrates the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, upon the decision of the United Nations (UN) in 2021. Hate speech undermines social cohesion, promotes racism, xenophobia and intolerance, and has serious impact on efforts to promote peace, security, and sustainable development. Hate speech identifies a person or group of people as an enemy to be denigrated, leading to increased marginalization and discrimination in society and encouraging an atmosphere of violence and repression. Many criminal codes around the world contain provisions defining and prohibiting hate speech as a criminal offense.
6. To provide a unified framework for the UN to address the issue of increasing hate speech globally, the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (May 2019) defines hate speech as “*any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks use pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor*”. However, there is no uniform definition of hate speech in international human rights law and the concept remains the subject of widespread debate, particularly in relation to freedom of expression and equality.

7. The current socio-political situation in the world points to the urgent need for the formation of new ideological priorities that will allow to reverse the mounting conflict of civilizations that may entail such negative consequences as the growth of xenophobia, the cultivation of hostilities on national and cultural grounds, racism, national discrimination, hatred and hate speech. It should be noted that given different forms of hate speech in a specific historical and cultural context, a speech that is not considered as hate speech in one context may be taken as a hate speech in another.

8. Today, the world is witnessing the increase of hatred and hate speech in public and the mass media. Its scale and influence are intensified by new advances in the field of communication technologies as well as global crises, including pandemics, conflicts, economic difficulties, etc. The danger of hate speech is that it can pose a clear and direct risk of inciting hatred, violence, discrimination, disorder and may trigger crime. It is becoming increasingly clear that hate speech, creating enemies and manipulating public opinion, especially in the online environment, is one of the most dangerous methods of spreading dividing rhetoric that threatens peaceful coexistence.

9. The changing social reality requires taking tolerance as one of the fundamental ideological priorities of the modern times. Fostering intercultural tolerance is important for the formation of an individual with a sense of respect for other peoples, their traditions, values and achievements, and awareness of the cultural diversity of the world. In this context, the model of tolerant relations is a society in which freedom and tolerance of any opinion prevail. In this regard, special attention must be attributed to education, which plays a decisive role in combating hate speech.

10. Intercultural dialogue has extremely important functions in international relations. Culture and cultural ties are one of the effective ways to create a favourable environment and an important tool of soft power. Intercultural dialogue in modern international relations implies a set of measures developed and implemented by the state in its foreign policy. Such dialogue promotes friendly attitude towards all people, regardless of their opinions and aspirations, mentality, and ideological, political, ethnical or religion affiliation. Such relationships can be achieved through tolerance towards people and patience that guides a person to understanding another person, another culture and another religion.

11. International cultural relations today are the most important form of communication among countries. The new challenges of modern times faced by countries in the field of international relations in the context of globalization and integration make cultural cooperation essential for establishing intercultural dialogue. Cultural ties have unique possibilities for creating favourable conditions and solving diverse economic, social and political problems.

12. Tolerance, in turn, helps to achieve compromise and resolve conflicts and contradictions. It shares the understanding that people may not always agree with the opinions and beliefs of other people, and that one must take this fact into account in order to live and work together. Tolerance can be observed in various spheres of public behaviour: individual and collective, scientific and ordinary, political and moral, ethnic and religious, within different age, social and demographic groups. Tolerance is one of the basic concepts of democratic principles in interaction with each other and with the authorities and is understood by people as a guarantee of mutual understanding, respect and patience.

13. On the other hand, hatred and hate speech pose a threat to democratic values, social stability, cooperation, and the creation of a peaceful, inclusive and just society. Hate speech undermines cooperation and triggers division and hostility. Various forms of intolerance are often used by extremists artificially generating national and religious hatred and social conflicts. Combating hate speech is a multi-layered task that implies addressing the root

causes, preventing its transformation into violence and tackling the wider social consequences. Hate speech refers to any type of communication that is directed against an individual or group of people or uses discriminatory language about religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, origin, or other factors. This also may include stereotyping, inciting hatred and promoting violence.

14. Hate speech is also seen as a key element of modern political discourse. Hate speech disrupts intercultural dialogue and is seen as a potential social problem that can cause violence and endanger mutual human coexistence. It undermines social cohesion, stability, sustainable development, human rights and erodes shared values. Social and political stability, civil solidarity, as well as religious and ethnic tolerance is the logical result of sound national policies backed by progressive historical traditions.

15. In the digital age, particular importance is attributed to the hate speech in Internet and developing effective responsive measures. As a result of the rapid growth of information exchange on the Internet and social networks, people of all ages massively started to socialise within social networks, including children, teen-agers, and youth. Collective participation in social networks, with rational use of online resources, help improve mutual understanding between different cultures and nations within the framework of a dialogue of cultures, global information exchange, and levelling disparities. Cultural interaction leads to understanding the multiplicity of cultures, the diversity of worldviews and the possibility of different assessments by representatives of different cultures. However, contrary to promoting understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect among individuals and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds, hate speech poses a significant threat to intercultural dialogue.

16. The Black Sea Region, located at the crossroads of different civilizations and cultures, has a rich historical experience of the coexistence of peoples of different cultural and religious traditions. Activities within the PABSEC have always served as an instrument of interaction and dialogue on a wide range of issues. However, in the light of the recent events in the region and the tense socio-political situation hate speech is becoming more common on the Internet and in real life leading to escalating tensions and discord and impeding efforts to build positive relationships based on shared values and mutual understanding. Protracting this situation can erode trust and goodwill, harm all countries in the region and contribute to a negative social environment, hampering the exchange of ideas and values that are vital for cooperation. Addressing hate speech is crucial for creating an environment that supports open, respectful, and constructive interactions among individuals of different cultural backgrounds. To this end, it is necessary to gradually open up opportunities for reconciliation and restoration of good neighbourly relations based on the valuable experience of peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the region.

17. States have been taking various measures to fight against hate speech. In order to effectively combat hatred and hate speech, targeted measures are being taken in the field of legal support. Laws prohibiting hate speech have been enacted, serving as a deterrent, and providing a legal basis for bringing perpetrators to justice. These laws balance the right to freedom of expression with the need to protect individuals and groups from hate speech.

18. Another area in which urgent measures need to be taken is upbringing and education. Schools and educational institutions play a vital role in educating about the values of tolerance and intercultural understanding. Promoting education and awareness of the impact of hate speech can help people recognize and reject hate speech. Programs aimed at promoting diversity and tolerance can help create a more inclusive society. Building strong, cohesive communities that value diversity and inclusion can help prevent the spread of hate

speech. Initiatives by civil institutions that encourage dialogue and mutual support can help combat hate speech.

19. Cultural policy is an important element of the government strategy that contributes to the development of the country as a whole and the well-being of each individual by promoting cultural diversity and respect for human rights; promoting mutual respect and intercultural dialogue; promoting culture through existing cooperation frameworks; supporting culture as a driver for sustainable social and economic development; promoting intercultural dialogue and the role of culture for peaceful inter-community relations.

20. Civil society organizations and IT companies also have a significant role to play in preventing the rise of hate speech on the Internet. The collaboration of the governmental structures with civil society organizations, by promoting intercultural dialogue on non-discrimination, tolerance, and respect through awareness-raising activities to combat hate speech, foster partnerships to address root causes of discrimination. Additionally, in cooperation with IT companies it is possible to develop joint frameworks that balance freedom of expression, freedom of speech and non-proliferation of hate speech.

### ***The Role of Parliaments***

21. Parliaments have a special role to play in countering hate speech, working with various partners and emphasizing a human rights-based approach, including the protection of freedom of expression, promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance.

22. By means of enacting legislation parliaments promote intercultural dialogue and tolerance in the fight against hate speech. Adopting laws that clearly define and criminalize hate speech, improve responses to hate speech, and ensure greater mutual respect and solidarity.

23. Through active public engagement, parliamentarians make a constructive contribution to building a society in which the rights of every person are respected and protected, which is based on equality, and in which there is no room for hatred. They participate in creating legislation that ensures equal opportunities and inclusive society, as well as strengthening intercultural dialogue and tolerance in the context of combating hate speech.

24. Parliaments are actively involved in efforts to establish mechanisms to monitor and respond effectively to incidents of hate speech and intolerance, thereby facilitating timely intervention and preventing the harm of hate speech. Sustainable monitoring of the problem lays the foundation for necessary laws and policies and their timely implementation.

25. The parliamentary collaboration with government, civil society organizations, media and IT companies strengthen collective action to comprehensively combat hate speech. Joint initiatives can facilitate effective information sharing, capacity building, and coordinated responses.

26. The specialized parliamentary committees dealing with the issues of tolerance and intercultural dialogue work to combat hate speech and its proliferation that is fundamental to maintain an enabling environment for human rights and promoting a culture of respect and inclusion. It is essential to consider various issues associated with hate speech, particularly national, racial or religious hatred.

27. Legislative measures in regulating information campaigns to counter the use of hate speech and incitement to discrimination in the audio-visual media and in the public space are essential and aim at raising awareness of the public. The promotion of media literacy programs helps individuals to critically evaluate information and prevent the dissemination of discriminatory narratives.

28. The participation of parliamentarians in international and regional forums provides an opportunity to exchange experiences and practices in combating hate speech and contribute to global efforts to strengthen tolerance and intercultural dialogue. The multilateral format of interparliamentary cooperation helps create the necessary platforms for the exchange of information and best practices, as well as for discussing opportunities to strengthen mutual support.

29. Through a combination of legislative measures, parliaments help create a more inclusive and harmonious environment that discourages hate speech and promotes unity and understanding, as well as freedom of opinion and expression.

#### ***Situation in the BSEC Member States***

30. The National Strategy for Gender Equality of *the Republic of Albania* (2021-2030), foresees a reduction of all forms of harmful practices, gender-based and domestic violence which foresees fulfilling some specific objectives, such as analysing the civil and criminal legal framework on gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexism and the identification of provisions that do not prohibit or favour harmful practices.

31. The Memorandum of Cooperation on the fight against hate speech, signed in 2019 during the national conference “Freedom without Hate”, organized by the Albanian Ombudsman and supported by the “Horizontal Instrument for the Western Balkans and Türkiye 2019-2022”, has brought together important public institutions and independent agencies in the field of anti-discrimination to give life to an Alliance which focuses on the protection and promotion of diversity and the fight against hate speech.

32. The Alliance established with the support of the Council of Europe office in Tirana has the following objectives: to combat hate speech by raising awareness, informing and contributing to a national dialogue, creating bridges of dialogue and interaction with civil society and public bodies on the consequences of hate speech, promoting freedom of expression as a necessity of a democratic society by facilitating an open and sensitizing debate for promoting diversity in the media and respecting human rights.

33. Under the project “Horizontal Facility”, awareness campaigns and meetings with the police stations of different cities in Albania in cooperation with the Council of Europe office in Tirana, have been conducted. Another important measures in the fight against hate speech include meetings with the leaders of the religious communities in Albania, cooperation with the diplomatic corps, collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and organization of information campaigns against violence and hatred.

34. Measures to combat hate speech are envisaged in the Action plan deriving from the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights for 2023-2025, adopted by the Decision No 1674-L of the Government of *the Republic of Armenia* (of 28 September 2023). These measures include the introduction of administrative and civil responsibility for the mildest manifestations of hate speech in the second half of 2024; the continuation of the awareness-raising campaigns; the development of recommendations for the police, investigative authorities, the prosecutor's office, and the approval of guidelines for the investigation of cases of discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes.

35. In May 2021 amendments were introduced to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia focusing primarily on regulations related to hate speech and public calls for violence. Though responsibility for inciting national, racial or religious enmity was also criminalised in the past, new Criminal code enlarged the scope and provided more comprehensive definition for the crime. Part 1 of Article 329 defines: “Public speech instigating or propagating hatred, discrimination, intolerance or hostility towards a person or a group of persons based on racial, national, ethnic or social origin, religion, political or

other views, or other personal and social circumstances, as well as disseminating material or object for that purpose”. The Law also considers commission of crimes motivated by hatred as aggravating circumstances.

36. Fight against hate speech features prominently within the cooperation between Armenia and Council of Europe. One of the examples to this end is the Project on Promoting Equality and Non-Discrimination, which, among others, aims at combating hate speech through capacity building and human rights education. During the 51st session of the Human Right Council Armenia initiated a joint statement, acknowledging the increase in online hate speech and harassment and the fact that decisions based on algorithmic systems of predefined rules may amplify discrimination. The statement was supported by cross regional group of 42 states.

37. Emphasizing the need to effectively combat any manifestation of hate speech, the Office of the Human Rights Defender cooperates with national and international partners. As part of the fight against hate speech, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed on 3 November 2022, aimed at implementing the Program "Affirmation of Pluralistic Tolerance in a Democratic Society", which is funded by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Office of the Human Rights Defender envisages planning appropriate educational programs to combat hate speech, stereotypes, and discrimination and ensuring their effective application; conducting large-scale public hate speech awareness, its consequences, and prevention among the population; establishment and improvement of a legal framework that reaches balance between freedom of expression and the protection of the rights and dignity of other people.

38. The Milli Mejlis of *the Republic of Azerbaijan* contributes to the promotion of intercultural dialogue in the country and the region through different actions. The parliament enacts laws to protect the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their nationality, religion, or ethnicity. It also promotes intercultural understanding and tolerance by supporting multicultural programs in schools and universities, organizing cultural events and festivals, and establishing intercultural centres. The Milli Mejlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan is also actively combating hate speech by enacting laws that prohibit discrimination, hate speech, and the expression of hostility based on race, religion, nationality, and other characteristics. The parliament works with civil society, including non-governmental organizations, activists, and public figures, to jointly combat hate speech. The parliament provides support to victims of hate speech and intolerance through the establishment of protection and compensation mechanisms, such as legal aid, psychological support, and rehabilitation.

39. Since 2008, every two years Azerbaijan hosts the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue within the framework of the “Baku Process” initiated by the Republic of Azerbaijan in close cooperation with prominent international partners. It is a global initiative aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and harmony in different countries. The success and enormous contribution of the Baku Process have been repeatedly emphasized at the international level, and its invaluable role in the development of intercultural dialogue has been enshrined in the reports and decisions of major international organizations.

40. The 6<sup>th</sup> Forum on “Dialogue for Peace and Global Security” (Baku, 1-3 May 2024) has gathered representatives of governments, international organizations, experts, academics, policymakers, and practitioners with the aim to engage in meaningful discussions on the evolving dynamics of intercultural communication and global security in an interconnected world. Given the importance of the parliamentary dimension of intercultural dialogue, on 2 May 2024 an Inter-Parliamentary Conference was also organized within the framework of

the Forum. The Conference on “The Role and Best Practices of the Legislature in the Protection of Cultural Heritage”, highlighted the great importance of legislative processes in the preservation of cultural heritage and became a platform for the exchange of views on parliamentary cooperation.

41. The actions of the Milli Mejlis to promote intercultural dialogue and combat hate speech have a positive impact on the Black Sea region. By creating a tolerant society and supporting intercultural understanding, Azerbaijan is becoming an example for other countries in the region. This contributes to the reduction of tensions and conflicts, as well as strengthens cooperation and peace among the different peoples. The role of the Azerbaijani parliament in promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance in the fight against hate speech in the Black Sea region is an important factor in achieving peace and stability.

42. In *the Republic of Bulgaria*, hate speech is criminalized both in the Criminal Code, where it is described as a crime and in self-regulatory documents of the media, e.g. Code of Ethics for Bulgarian Journalists. A new legal framework in the field of media to prevent and counter hate speech and hate crimes was adopted on 22 December 2020 by the Act amending and supplementing the Radio and Television Act, which finally transposes into Bulgarian law the provisions of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

43. Also, under the E-Commerce Act, video-sharing platform providers in Bulgaria take appropriate measures to protect audiences from user-generated videos and audiovisual commercial communications, whose content incites violence or hatred directed against a group or a member of a group on any of the grounds set out in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; with content the dissemination of which constitutes a criminal offense under the Criminal Code - public incitement to commit terrorist offenses, offences related to child pornography and offences related to racism and xenophobia.

44. The topic of aggression and overcoming hate speech is an exclusive focus of the education policies of the Republic of Bulgaria, and the approaches to achieving these goals are diverse. The Ministry of Education and Science recently proposed measures to deal with aggression, including more psychologists in schools, active work with parents, and involvement of children and parents in prevention. The “Steps Together” program for the prevention of violence and bullying in schools, aimed at ensuring a safe school environment, was implemented.

45. Based on the results of the “Steps Together” program, the Ministry of Education and Science prepared and implemented the National Program “Support for Personal Development of Children and Students”, module “School without Aggression for a Secure School Environment”, which collected 196 stories, models and good practices from school psychologists, school principals and students related to the prevention of violence and the creation of a safe school environment in educational institutions. At the regional level, mentors have been introduced to support the implementation of the “Steps Together” program.

46. The Constitution of *the Hellenic Republic* guarantees the freedom of religion and the freedom of expression of the press. Also, law 4411/2016 criminalizes acts of a racist and xenophobic nature, committed via computer systems. In addition, according to article 82A of the Penal Code, if a crime has been committed against a victim whose choice was made on the grounds of race, color, national or ethnic origin, genealogy, religion, disability, gender orientation, identity, or gender characteristics, in case of a misdemeanor offense punishable by up to one year in prison, the minimum sentence is increased by six months.



47. The Hellenic Republic attaches the utmost importance to safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons located within the Greek territory, the protection of democratic institutions, and the respect for the rule of law. Combating racism, intolerance, and racist crimes has been a recognized priority in Greece in recent years. Racism and xenophobia are in direct conflict with the principles of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, on which the European Union is founded.

48. The National Council against Racism and Intolerance (NCRI) was established by Law 4356/2015 as a collective advisory body, acting under the General Secretariat for Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice. Some of the Council's important responsibilities include: Design policies to prevent and combat racism and intolerance; Supervise the implementation of the laws against racism and intolerance and the compliance thereof with international and European laws and Drafting the National Action Plan against Racism and Intolerance, the implementation of which is systematically monitored.

49. The National Action Plan against Racism and Intolerance (NAPAR) 2020-2023 was adopted under the project "Developing a comprehensive strategy against racism, intolerance, and hate crime". NAPAR reflects and implements, in practice, zero tolerance of the Greek State towards any kind of racism and intolerance within the country. According to this Plan, the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms constitute the basic principles of the Constitution of Greece.

50. *The Republic of Moldova* has several laws regulating intercultural dialogue and hate speech. A remarkable progress represented the adoption, on 31 July 2023, of the law initiated by the President of the Republic of Moldova that laid the foundations of the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation. The Centre has the mission to coordinate and implement the state policy in the field of information security and ensure strategic communication in order to identify, prevent and combat disinformation at the national level.

51. On 22 December 2023, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Decision on the approval of the Concept for strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation actions and foreign interference for the years 2024-2028. The document represents the programmatic vision of how strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation actions and foreign interference will contribute to the fulfilment of the Centre's mission in the period of 2024-2028. It also aims to align with good practices and existing standards at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe regarding the fight against disinformation.

52. The Code of Audiovisual Media Services, adopted in 2018, regulates hate speech in an extended version and establishes clear sanctions for this type of speech in audiovisual media. The Code bans, as well, audiovisual programs likely to propagate, incite, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance or discrimination on sex, race, nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. At the same time, the Audiovisual Media Services Code prohibits the use of sexist language, a form close to hate speech, and scenes of violence and degrading behaviour towards women and men in audiovisual media services.

53. The National Development Plan for 2024-2026 aims to financially support the cultural projects of public associations on the dimension of "national minorities" (2024-2026). The Program and Action Plan for the implementation of the National Human Rights Program for 2024-2027, provides for the creation of a platform for capitalizing on cultural differences through interaction and communication (2025-2027), and the implementation of a Program

for the support and promotion of forms of cultural expression of national minorities, including measures to increase access to cultural products and services (2025-2027).

54. The Government of **Romania** adopted on 13 May 2021, the first National Strategy for preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech for 2021-2023, and the related Action Plan. The Strategy's goal was to achieve a correlation of sectoral efforts aimed at preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech by: improving the collection of data about these phenomena in Romania; securing the legal framework; training programs for law enforcement agents and magistrates; consolidating the school curricula; developing pilot cultural programs to prevent the proliferation of such phenomena in the Romanian society. The strategy is mentioned as a model of good practice by the European Commission and its main objectives aim to promote tolerance, civic education, and the resilience of the Romanian society to anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech.

55. Another objective of the Strategy was to improve data collection mechanisms on incidents associated with this phenomenon through the development of a methodology at the level of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the identification of hate crimes and the systematic collection of statistical data on hate crimes. The Parliament of Romania adopted, on 13 September 2023, a law on amending Article 369 of Law No 286/2009 on Penal Code, which amendment brings greater clarity to the rules and criteria under which such an offence will be criminalized.

56. 2024 will see the first results of the 2021-2023 Strategy, that is expected to increase efficiency and completion of sectoral instruments and initiatives developed so far to combat these problems, and at the same time to raise public awareness in Romania about these phenomena. Based on the findings of the various assessment exercises in Romania included in this first Strategy, future legislative initiatives will be developed to complement or enhance the effectiveness of the national legal framework.

57. The National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) is the autonomous state authority, under parliamentary control, which carries out its activity in the field of combatting discrimination. NCCD is the guarantor of the respect and application of the principle of non-discrimination, in accordance with the domestic legislation in force and with the international documents to which Romania is a party. It can also propose to the Parliament draft legislation in the field of combating discrimination.

58. In 2009, the National Assembly of **the Republic of Serbia** adopted the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination. In Article 11, it recognises, defines and sanctions hate speech as a form of discrimination. The same law established the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, as an independent state body elected by the National Assembly. The Commissioner acts on complaints about discrimination, initiates and conducts court proceedings for protection against discrimination and warns the public about the most common, typical and severe cases of discrimination, including hate speech. Every year, the Commissioner submits a Regular Annual Report to the National Assembly, in which the issue of hate speech is addressed.

59. In 2022, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality issued an opinion in 14 cases on complaints related to the violation of the provisions of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which refer to hate speech and to harassment and humiliating behaviour. According to data from the non-governmental sector, 25% of acts of hate speech refer to nationality, 14.6% to sexual minorities and 9.4% to migrants, while journalists and political leaders and officials make up half of the perpetrators of hate speech.

60. In December 2020, the National Assembly passed the Decision on the introduction of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament, which was amended in September 2021.

In the coming period, it is necessary to conduct a more comprehensive study on the spread of hate speech, with a special focus on the Internet space. Also, it is necessary to additionally strengthen the institution of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality to increase his/her capacity to act in procedures for protection against hate speech.

61. As part of the implementation of the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period from 2022 to 2030, several activities aimed at preventing and combating hate speech are foreseen. These activities involve raising awareness among journalists and political officials about the harmful use of hate speech, and they focus on examples of good practice, especially when it comes to employers who have adopted codes against hate speech for their employees.

62. *The Republic of Türkiye* supports initiatives combating racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and anti-Islamism in all international and regional platforms. As a result of the joint initiatives with the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), resolutions were adopted by the UN that consider all acts of violence against holy books as religious hatred and a violation of international law. The Committee on Human Rights Inquiry of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye has carried out many activities combating hate speech. The Subcommittee for Examining and Researching Rising Racism and Islamophobia in European Countries, established on 17 February 2021, carried out studies to prevent racism from becoming a reality of daily life and to oppose the institutionalization of discrimination.

63. “Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the Training Program against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement Officers” was signed between the Police Academy Presidency and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on 22 January 2016, to organize this program. Within the scope of the said Memorandum of Understanding, a total of 55 personnel, 52 of them were ranked, were trained as trainers, and informational seminars were organized for 33,782 personnel in 2022.

64. The Human Rights Action Plan stipulates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall monitor national and international developments that constitute discrimination and hate speech/crimes such as Islamophobia, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and racism, and prepare periodic reports. Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) is the authorized institution to combat discrimination according to Law No 6701. The Directorate of Communications conducts awareness-raising activities on hate speech and discrimination by preparing training and handbooks for media workers. In addition, a guide named “Accurate Journalism and Media Ethics” has been prepared regarding the ethical problems caused by disinformation, fake news, privacy violations, and hate speech in traditional and online media in 2023.

65. It is worrying that hatred against Islam is increasing worldwide, especially in European countries. Since January 2023, nearly 600 hate crimes have been committed by burning the Holy Quran in front of the embassies of the OIC member countries. In recent years, there has been an increase in attacks against Turkish citizens living in Western European countries, their properties, and mosques. The 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Information Ministers of the OIC Member Countries, held in 2022, was dedicated to “Combating Disinformation and Islamophobia in the Post-Truth Age”.

### III. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND EXPERIENCE

66. International and regional organizations contribute to the global effort to combat hate speech by raising awareness, promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue, and advocating for policies that address its root causes. The international frameworks emphasize a balanced

approach, recognizing the importance of preventing hate speech that can lead to discrimination, hostility, or violence.

### ***The United Nations (UN)***

67. In 2019, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres launched the United Nations Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Hate Speech. The Strategy notes that hate speech has been a precursor to atrocities in recent years. This first UN system-wide policy initiative to combat hate speech aims to complement an effective legal framework to combat hate speech, xenophobia and discrimination and to advance the fight against discrimination and inequality.

68. The UN Strategy and Plan of Action provides a road map on how the organization can support and complement the efforts of the countries. The strategy emphasizes the need to counter hate speech holistically, while respecting freedom of opinion and expression, and to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations, media outlets, IT companies, and social media platforms.

69. The international human rights law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirm the right to freedom of expression but also recognize limitations to prevent the advocacy of hostility. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination emphasizes the need to combat racial and other forms of discrimination, which can include hate speech. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is a core human rights treaty that addresses hate speech indirectly. It recognizes the right to freedom of expression but also imposes limitations to prevent advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.

### ***United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)***

70. The UNDP Global Policy Network Brief, namely “The Parliaments in the Fight Against Hate Speech”, provides an overview of the background, drivers, enablers, and impact of hate speech and identifies strategies to counter it, with a focus on the role of the parliaments. The brief provides meaningful and practical guidance for the parliamentarians on actions they can take to reduce and counter hate speech while fostering peace, constructive dialogue, and trust. According to the UNDP, the parliaments can be a positive force for change by taking concrete actions to address and mitigate the prevalence and impact of hate speech on those who are most vulnerable in society, including women, minorities, etc.

### ***The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)***

71. The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence (October 2012) brings together the conclusions and recommendations from several OHCHR expert workshops (held in Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, Bangkok, and Santiago de Chile). By grounding the debate in international human rights law, the objective has been threefold: To gain a better understanding of legislative patterns, judicial practices, and policies regarding the concept of incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred, while ensuring full respect for freedom of expression as outlined in articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); To arrive at a comprehensive assessment of the state of implementation of the prohibition of incitement in conformity with international human rights law and; To identify possible actions at all levels.

### ***United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)***

72. UNESCO counters hate speech through education, media, and information literacy, promotes international standards on freedom of expression to address root causes of hate speech, and supports countries to build effective responses, including by fostering the

capacity building of regulators and judicial operators. UNESCO has also launched an educational guide on addressing hate speech, namely “Countering Hate Speech through Education”, which aims to promote understanding of hate speech by developing educational programs that address its root causes and counter its manifestations, both online and offline. UNESCO advocates for increased transparency and accountability for digital platforms to counter online disinformation and speech that incite hatred and discrimination.

### ***Council of Europe (COE)***

73. The Council of Europe has issued a set of guidelines aimed at preventing and combating online and offline hate speech. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is a human rights expert body that monitors action against discrimination (on the grounds of “race”, ethnic or national background, skin colour, citizenship, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics), and intolerance in Europe. ECRI deals with the phenomena of racism, discrimination, and intolerance that are or may be of a structural or general nature. However, it is not entitled to receive individual complaints, which are handled by the European Court of Human Rights. Based on its findings, ECRI published General Policy Recommendation 15 on Combating hate speech, providing guidelines to the Member States to counter this phenomenon.

74. The Anti-Discrimination Department is responsible for the Council of Europe’s work on policy, monitoring, and capacity building for tackling discrimination and hate speech, and for strengthening inclusive societies. The “No Hate Speech Movement” youth campaign, is a good example of how the joint efforts of the Member States, civil society organizations, and human rights bodies, can successfully mobilize citizens to combat hate speech and promote human rights online.

### ***European Union (EU)***

75. The European Union’s approach to combating hate speech involves a combination of legal frameworks, cooperation with online platforms, educational efforts, and collaboration with various stakeholders. The goal is to create a cohesive and inclusive society that respects fundamental rights and rejects discrimination.

76. The EU has adopted legal instruments to combat hate speech, such as the “Framework Decision on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia”. This framework aims to harmonize laws across the Member States, ensuring a consistent and effective approach to addressing hate speech. The EU has also established a “Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online” in collaboration with major online platforms, which encourages the swift removal of illegal hate speech content and promotes cooperation between tech companies, civil society, and public authorities.

77. The EU’s Equal Treatment Directive addresses discrimination and promotes equal treatment in various areas, including employment and access to goods and services. This directive contributes to combating hate speech by establishing a legal framework against discrimination.

## **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

78. Special feature of the Black Sea Region is that different peoples, with different cultures, traditions and religions live and cooperate here. Therefore, intercultural dialogue is an important tool for interaction, which makes it possible to preserve and enhance the diversity of cultures of different peoples and countries and, thus, is a constructive tool for the human development and soft power in international relations. In the context of today’s total informatization of societies and global changes in the cultural sphere, multiculturalism is becoming increasingly important and topical. Dialogue among cultures remains one of the most important challenges of our time and is extremely important for strengthening social

cohesion and resolving contradictions and inequalities through the free expression of opinions, aspirations, and needs through democratic debate and discussion. Intercultural dialogue reduces the level of intolerance and the spread of hostile stereotypes, strengthens the cohesion of democratic societies and helps to tackle conflict situations.

79. Strengthening tolerance as the basic principle of a democratic society is an indispensable condition for successful intercultural dialogue. It forwards peaceful coexistence, allowing communities and nations to focus their resources and efforts on the common goals and challenges. By promoting respect for different cultures, it is necessary to join forces and use all possible resources to address the global challenge of combating hatred and hate speech.

80. The phenomenon of hate speech is one of the most challenging and requires comprehensive and continuous counteraction at national regional and global levels. The complexity of hate speech, given the variety of forms it can take and the areas in which it can occur, makes it difficult to achieve the goal of effectively preventing and combating it. Hate speech imposes serious threat to the intercultural dialogue, undermining social stability and collaboration, fuelling discrimination and igniting mistrust, misunderstanding and harmful social environment. In the time of the rapid growth of information sharing and the intentional use of disinformation, hate speech becomes one of the key challenges to the societal cohesion in the world.

81. Combating hate speech is important for maintaining stable societies, preservation of human rights, and ensuring international solidarity. Addressing hate speech requires a multifaceted approach, with intercultural dialogue and tolerance at its core. This work places special importance to increasing the effectiveness of the legislative framework and the efficiency of educational and awareness-raising campaigns with the participation of civil society.

82. The role of parliaments becomes increasingly important in promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance in the fight against hate speech. By elaborating and enacting the necessary laws to observe human rights and strengthen a culture of respect and inclusion, parliaments initiate policy action against hate speech. Parliaments also initiate mechanisms to monitor cases of hate speech, as well as create special committees to promote constructive dialogue and debate on hate speech issues promoting greater understanding and tolerance among different groups within society.

83. Even though, all BSEC Member States have enacted legislation, which aims to prevent hate speech, more work is needed for broader efforts to promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance and respect. It is necessary to ensure that hate speech does not impede the ability of people to work together towards common goals, progress and development at the national and international environment. In this regard, a special responsibility falls on politicians, religious and societal actors and other public figures capable of influencing wide audiences to warn about the dangers and destructiveness of hate speech and prevent it.

84. In situations when spread and influence of hate speech is not halted, the destructive ideas find fertile ground, become socially acceptable and can lead to negative and dangerous consequences in societies. For this reason, there is a need to strengthen collaboration at all levels to identify effective legal approaches that promote a more tolerant and inclusive environment in which hate speech is replaced by understanding, respect and unity.