



WORKING SESSION III

Dear moderator,
Dear chairman, excellences, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Gözde Taskaya and I am here as a representative of "Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft".

First of all, we have to say, that we feel glad that Austria is one of those ten OSCE-countries which are collecting official data on bias against Muslims. But if we look at the numbers provided by the NGO's collecting anti-Muslim hate-crime data there is a huge difference to the numbers recorded by Austrian police. One of the reasons why the figures differ from each other is that we can not convince victims, who are mostly women, to go to the police. One of the reasons for that is trust issues between Muslim citizens in Austria and officials like police officers, but also politicians and journalists. Therefore, such cases are still highly underreported. Police officers are legally obligated to report hate-crimes, but the practice shows, that if people want to report hate crimes or hate incidents, police officers don't treat these cases as such. This is may be because of the lack of knowledge and unawareness of public officers on these issues. Yet, this is not only a problem in Austria.

If OSCE countries really want to work on these kind of trust issues of its religious minorities, they have to provide trainings for police officers in order to rise awareness on hate crimes

I also want to talk about another very important issue we are facing when it comes to Islamophobia. Unfortunately, Islamophobia has reached the middle of our society. In Austria we have the so called "Documentation Centre Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate-crimes" for Muslims collecting data regarding discrimination, hate-crimes and hate-speeches against Muslims. Their report 2016 has shown a step increase of 62% of anti-Muslim hate crimes in comparison to 2015.

Unfortunately, Islamophobia has become mainstream because the media and politicians support it by using wordings which are very dangerous. These narratives further intolerance against Muslims and destroy social cohesion.

If we take a look on what happened in Austria in 2017 so far:

Austria passed a law against full face-veils which becomes effective in October 2017. There are still constant public discussions on a Burkini-Ban in Austria. Furthermore, we had the decision of the European Court of Justice. Austrian companies rely upon it in order to lay off women with hijab. By that, laws which should ensure equal treatment in the working world, are being invalidated.

Although we know, that studies proved that a Muslim women wearing a Hijab has less opportunities to get a job than someone without it, the government has started to legalize this state by introducing new laws that explicitly prohibit Muslim headgear in certain public offices.

And now debates are going on in which the demand has risen to forbid Islamic kinder gardens, altogether. Day by day we experience discrimination in different forms. On Wednesday another shocking peek was reached with the headline "close borders for Muslims" in one of the most popular newspapers in Austria.

Our recommendations are:

- The first step in addressing and preventing non-tolerance and discrimination is to acknowledge the severity of the problem: the rise of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate-incidents. We recommend ODIHR to recognize the term Islamophobia in combination to anti-Muslim hate-crimes.
- We should break down stereotypes that have been perpetuated through negative and islamophobic media coverage. For this we recommend mandatory education and awareness-raising to prevent intolerance and discrimination especially among police, public officers and teachers. We advocate educational work in cooperation with different Muslim associations in the respective cities and countries.
- Police officers should be trained and educated on recording hate-crimes. Rising awareness is not only in the interest of the victims but also one of the important responsibilities of officials.
- We recommend every OSCE country to conduct a self-evaluation report in order to see if the OSCE countries observe the commitments they agreed upon. These analyses should be in close cooperation with civil organisations and NGO's, similar to the self-evaluation report that countries which held the chairmanship conducted.