



OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

Freedom of Religion or Belief: Issues, Opportunities, and the Specific Challenges of Combatting Anti-Semitism and Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other Religions

22-23 June 2017

Mr. Moderator,

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has made major achievements in its monitoring of freedom of religion and belief in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. The Commission is specialised in questions relating to racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination on grounds such as “race”, national/ethnic origin, citizenship, language and religion.

ECRI country reports show that religion is sometimes used as a pretext to justify discrimination on other grounds as well as violence. ECRI has also reported on the rise of religious hatred through the Internet.

ECRI considers that rejecting all manifestations of religious extremism is the first step to ensure that the freedom of religious thought is fully guaranteed.

Many recommendations in those reports call for a much more energetic application of existing criminal legislation on violence against religious groups. ECRI believes that national and local authorities should reinforce vigilance to ensure that acts of religious extremism do not go unpunished; politicians and media should act to avoid perpetuating prejudice and biased information; religious communities should adopt an open attitude in order to encourage a frank exchange of views with the authorities and the other religious communities.

ECRI also adopts General Policy Recommendations (“GPR”) addressed to member states. They provide detailed guidelines which policy-makers are invited to use when drawing up national strategies and policies in a variety of fields.

In this context, ECRI launched in 2015 its GPR No. 15 on combating Hate Speech. A strong focus is placed in this text on the need for “counter-speech” and for public condemnations of hate speech, from high-level political representatives but also from religious and community leaders. ECRI considers crucial not to leave the sphere of public discourse open to anti-religion statements.

Thanks for your attention.