

Intervention by the St. John's Community of the Sovereign Order of Malta

Dear delegates, dear representatives of various NGOs. Let me in my short intervention present our experiences and opinions regarding the situation of freedom of expression west of Vienna.

Freedom of Expression is a key civil right. It must not be watered down by an alleged right not to be "offended" or a "freedom from hearing criticism" or a freedom from "hurt feelings". So-called hate speech legislation or anti-discrimination laws endanger freedom of expression and pluralism in this ambiguous way, which is impossible to legislate fairly and justly.

In increasingly secular and relativistic societies, religious propositions reflecting traditional moral values, and even at times, scientific facts, are discredited in favour of politically correct agendas. Individuals and religious organizations that raise objections to such agendas are often singled out and suffer harassment, intimidation, slander, aggression, and repression. This is becoming more evident in the area of sexual morality. Freedom of expression also includes the mention of one's religious beliefs in the public debate as well as in the work place.

In the roundtable on intolerance and discrimination of Christians on March 4th in Vienna, the negative stereotyping of Christians by media was mentioned as a particular problem. We urge OSCE/ODIHR to work against these negative tendencies using their existing tools and measures. The goal should be to encourage intelligent and objective debate and discussion, not to stop debate and discussion.

We feel outraged that our religious belief and sacred symbols are sometimes mocked, insulted, attacked or vilified. Respect for religious beliefs and symbols is fundamental to the right of freedom of religion. The OSCE must work to cultivate an environment of tolerance and respect also for traditional world views and spiritual values.

Thank you for your attention!