



OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Working Session 11

Tolerance and non-discrimination including Islamophobia

Warsaw, 26 September 2016

EMISCO is deeply worried about the rise of attacks motivated by the anti-Muslim hatred especially since the Paris and Brussels terrorist attack. We declare unambiguously that international developments, including acts of terror perpetrated by violent individuals or groups self-identifying with Islam, can never justify the normalization of the intolerance against Muslims. We are still waiting for the concretization of the Ministerial Declaration on intolerance against Muslims which will help a lot to ensure the effective struggle of this rising form of specific hatred.

In this way, we condemn all type of discrimination against Muslims and endeavor to prevent and protect against attacks directed at Muslim communities across the OSCE region, whether on persons or on places of worship or religious objects;

We note the disproportionate and specific impact of intolerance against Muslims on women, who are exposed to intolerance, discrimination and hate crime when trying to access their rights to, inter alia, education and employment.

We acknowledge the essential contribution made by civil society in preventing and responding to intolerance against Muslims, including by providing psychological and legal support to victims of hate crime and discrimination, as well as their engagement with local authorities and equality bodies.

Despite many historical hiccups, Europe has maintained its identity as a continent of democratic values, advancement of human rights and adherence to the rule of law. Ethnic and religious minorities that migrated to Europe in the sixties from many developing countries admired the fact that they enjoyed the same socio-economic, cultural and religious rights as the majority public when they found employment and decided to settle down in various European countries.

Unfortunately, after the global economic crisis that brought rising unemployment and austerity policies, minority presence became a focal point when societal issues were discussed in the media and by politicians.

From being welcomed groups, they became unwanted entities over the period of few decades. Muslim communities became the special target of scorn and ridicule in public discourse, media coverage and among populist politicians. For example, the securitisation of the society that applies specifically to Muslim communities gave the opportunity to reinforce some discriminatory measures.

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This unchecked development produced a fertile ground for extreme right-wing movements, an increased negative mainstream media coverage and volatile hate speech in social media. More and more voters turned to anti-Islam politicians, voting for their parties and electing their leaders to national and European parliaments. Today, almost all European countries from Finland to Italy and Hungary to UK have very successful anti-Islam parties, not only operating in the public arena but many are represented in the local and national assemblies. But the unprecedented influence of xenophobic and Islamophobic parties reflect a major normalisation of Islamophobia that runs deep into mainstream society and politics. It is very easy to notice how extreme views of Islam, originally associated with the far and the radical right, have been increasingly co-opted by liberal and conservative mainstream parties, largely normalised in everyday discourse, and absorbed into policies of European governments over the past two decades.

The hate-mongering politicians of the radical right are apparently succeeding in swapping a racist agenda for an Islamophobic one; but it is mainstream politicians, intellectuals, and media who have smoothed the way for anti-Muslim bigotry to move closer to the mainstream.

With political trust at an all-time low, some mainstream politicians are taking advantage of voter apathy in national and local politics to advance their own cause. Islamophobia thus has become a successful political tool to mobilize the masses. The construction of the Muslim other has become a useful tool to distract from own failures and to justify miseries elsewhere.

That is why, EMISCO is focusing on the issue of political Islamophobia that is on the increase and is more dangerous than the far right anti-Islam movements. We demand the use of Islamophobia **in the official documents** as an established concept, defined as a form of discrimination and racism, as well as an **`orchestrated fear`** targeting individuals and communities based on their alleged adherence to the Islamic faith.

We call upon the participating States to:

- Encourage political leaders and public figures to speak out strongly and promptly when anti-Muslim incidents occur as well as for other majority religions;
- Re-define European values through an inclusive, pluralistic approach **based on a Reflexive VIRTUE ethics** that acknowledges the fruitful historical interaction between Judeo-Christian and Muslim values in order to move towards a more inclusive definition of what Europe stands for today;
- Introduce a new contract between governments, majority societies, and all ethnic and religious minorities, based on this re-defined discourse about “Western values”.
- Take steps to effectively address intolerance against Muslims in the OSCE area, both in preventing and responding to incidents by implementing concrete measures in every level;

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- Implement existing OSCE commitments related to monitoring hate crime and collecting relevant data on incidents targeting Muslim communities, ensuring that data is disaggregated to show specific bias motivations related to religion;
- Ensure that security measures and anti-terrorism efforts are not directed at any specific ethnic, religious or cultural group, in their design, implementation or impact;
- Collaborate with local civil society groups, and Muslim communities, through effective partnerships and strengthened dialogue to address intolerance, discrimination and to promote mutual respect and understanding.
- Encourage cultural and religious diversity in public debates, as well as in consultations during important legislative initiatives.
- Make progress in **intercultural and interreligious education** as recommended in the Council of Europe Reference Book on Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education published in 2007 in line with the European Cultural Convention (1954) (ETS No. 18) which underlines the need for education to develop mutual understanding between peoples.
- Given new challenges, OSCE political bodies and institutions should draft new, consolidated and deepened commitments on fighting the manifestations of direct and indirect Islamophobia experienced by Muslim communities, based on best practices and decisions of international human rights bodies, including opinions of the UN Human Rights Committee and jurisprudence of ECHR over the last decade. This work should be taken forward in the framework of Helsinki+40 process;
- OSCE should move beyond a focus on discrimination based on race/ ethnicity and expand the focus on discrimination based on religion. Discussion of Islamophobia should be more visible and institutionalized.
- OSCE terminology used in the field of religious discrimination should be updated and refined to bring it in line with the most progressive approaches.
- The OSCE/ODIHR unit dealing with Islamophobia should be strengthened.
- OSCE political bodies and institutions should strengthen cooperation with other relevant intergovernmental bodies addressing the issues of Islamophobia - for example, EU Commission's coordinator relating to Islamophobia, newly established initiative to deal with Islamophobia in the EU Parliament, EU Fundamental Rights Agency, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance – ECRI , UN special rapporteur on Islamophobia, etc.
- OSCE political bodies and institutions should urge participating States to provide funding for independent civil society groups among Muslim communities working on issues of Islamophobia.

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- The OSCE Chairmanship should publicly and consistently uphold the position that religious beliefs or traditional values cannot serve as justification for hate crimes against Muslims.

We call upon the ODIHR to:

- Facilitate open discussion and constructive dialogue among and between government officials, civil society, and religious or belief communities with the aim of implementing OSCE commitments on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief;
- Highlight patterns on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, in order to better understand and proactively address intolerance and discrimination against Muslims;
- Foster broad civil society co-operations, and the sharing of best practices among stakeholders, on educational initiatives, as well as other measures to raise awareness of intolerance against Muslims;
- ODIHR should develop and promote new guidelines for combating and preventing hate crimes against Muslims, including legislation, systems of registration and collection of statistical data on hate crimes, assistance to victims, etc., based on best practices and decisions of international human rights bodies, including decisions of the UN Committee for Human Rights and jurisprudence of ECHR over the last decade.
- Presentation of ODIHR's annual report on Islamophobia and its discussion by participating States should be included in the agenda of the Permanent Council and Human Dimension Committee.

In conclusion, **we underline that Islamophobia is not just a Muslim issue, it is a European issue for us all. Everything that needs to be done should be done for a New Europe without islamophobia.** EMISCO believes that Islamophobia as a political tool is more dangerous than any other narrative because in the hands of powerful politicians, it is becoming a norm and thus a big hindrance in the way of normal minority-majority co-existence. Be that as it may, OSCE must stand firm and not let European continent slip into the intolerant past. We must join hands to slay the dragon of Islamophobia and help build Europe again with everyone's help, Muslim and non-Muslim, alike. It is time we listen to the voices of sanity, not hate.

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