

Intervention: Recommendations to the OSCE
Tuesday 29. September 2009, Warsaw

From: Barbara Vittucci

Organisation: Forum for Civic Responsibility of the
Austrian Round Table/ Weg der Versöhnung

Topic: Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief

In order to ensure the implementation of thought, conscience, religion or belief in the OSCE participating States and to further true pluralism and healthy debate I and my colleagues of the Forum for Civic Responsibility of the Austrian Round Table would like to make the following recommendations to the OSCE which bring attention to current areas where freedom seems threatened:

→ **In the field of education** we urge OSCE/ODIHR to ensure the **right of parents to know and have a final say** on what their children are being taught with regards to religion and human sexuality.

→ **With regards to the teaching of religion**, it must be possible to teach religion in an affirmative way.

→ **Christian views on human sexuality must not be repressed** as a possible viewpoint in public schools. Also, religion teachers must retain the right to teach sexual ethics and morality. Christian private schools must be free to teach Christian teachings.

→ **Religious institutions** such as agencies, churches, missions, etc must not be forced to hire those opposed to the goals of the institution.

→ **Wearing religious symbols**, such as crosses, rings, clerical clothing, etc, must be protected as a manifestation of freedom of religion.

→ **Freedom of conscience must be safeguarded in realm of healthcare**, particularly with regard to medical procedures that harm the most vulnerable, the unborn and the elderly.

→ **Freedom of conscience and freedom of contract must be respected with regard to private entrepreneurship.** (Examples: A Christian architect should not be sued for declining to design a mosque; A Christian publisher should not be sued for declining to publish materials opposed to his/her faith; A Christian Advertising agency must not be sued for declining to advertise a lifestyle opposed to conscience.

→ **Expression of faith in the public square** must be possible without the threat of social exclusion and/or being ridiculed. In this point we agree with the position of Prof. Ombretta Fumagalli Carulli, which she expressed in her Keynote Speech to the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief on the 9th of July 2009 in Vienna:

"It emerges clearly from the OSCE commitments that religion is a real legal asset to be protected. Therefore, if the freedom of religion or belief rightly protects also the non-believers, an anti-religious atheism which preaches the need to remove the religion from public and private life of citizens should not be welcomed."

Our goal is also expressed in the title of Prof. Carulli's address: *"The way towards religious freedom: a success of religions, a success of the OSCE for security and democracy."* So let us further healthy debate, whether it is religious, scientific, anthropological or philosophical and be attentive to where forces try to squelch the debate and inquiry, for that could be the beginning of tyranny.