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Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

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In Western societies it is more and more widespread the false idea that religions are a negative fact, a fact that should be fought against, instead of an element of progress and well-being of our societies. The OSCE and its Participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and a pluralistic society have to remove the religion and its symbols (as the veil, but also the crucifix) from public life of citizens. A similar approach would be at odds with the very concept of religious freedom provided by the OSCE commitments. I also find appropriate to remember that the UN Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in her last Statement to the UN Human Rights Council, said that “it’s regrettable that societies with high level of income and education have openly expressed their aversion to see religious symbols in public”.

Moreover, as regard the building of mosques in non-Islamic States, you all know that there are people who subdue this right to the reciprocity with Islamic Countries but – as was remarked also by the UN Human Rights Committee – the principle of inter-State reciprocity in human rights has no place. However the availability of place of worship will be subdued to the zoning laws and ordinances which keep into account the demand of an equilibrated and correct land use, of its artistic, cultural, religious and environmental features. In addition the Participating States should promote a dialogue between the Muslim representatives and the religious communities present in the places where mosques are to be built in order to foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities.

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