



Associazione culturale **“Giuseppe Dossetti: i Valori”**
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Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
 Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

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Despite many commitments adopted by the participating States, in the OSCE Area – both East and West of Vienna – violations of freedom of religion or belief still subsist against Churches and Christian communities, as well as their own members, not only where they are minority but also where they are majority. It is therefore necessary to avoid an improper “ranking”, implying that violations against majority religions are less serious than those against minority ones: in both cases the human dignity is breached in the same way.

Undue restrictions persist against import and distribution of religious material as well as there are visa restrictions for missionaries or volunteers. Several undue restrictions remain also against the registration of Churches and Christian communities. Sometimes it happens that, in the presence of a majority religion, civil authorities do not recognize the legal personality of Churches and these are therefore subjected to limitations in other several issues often linked to acquiring legal personality (as such acquiring property for a place of worship and other religious use; eligibility to establish educational institutions for training clergy; arranging visits and ministries in hospitals, prisons, and the military; and so forth).

In other case the right of the religious communities to organize themselves according to their own hierarchical and institutional structure or the right to select, appoint and replace their personnel in accordance with their respective requirements and standards is not fully respected and there are undue interference of the civil authorities.

The OSCE participating States not always respect also the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. For example, children should not be forced to a compulsory sexual, religious or ethical teaching which can be not consistent with the convictions of the children’s parents: in this case participating States should provide non-discriminatory opt-out possibilities. On the other side, we should bear in mind



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that the raising multiculturalism is in no way contrary to a facultative confessional religious teaching in public schools.

More and more frequently in the OSCE Area medical practitioners or secretaries are sacked for refusing to deal with an abortion; marriage commissioners are instructed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies or else resign their posts and so on. The existing OSCE commitments recognize the conscientious objection only to military service but nowadays the participating States should guarantee the right of conscientious objection also to other ethical sensitive questions (as abortion, same sex marriage, children adoption by homosexuals, research on human embryo *et cetera*) in regard to the fact that religious freedom includes, *inter alia*, the right to live and act in accordance with the dictates of the conscience.

Attention should be drawn also to denial of Christian Churches’ public role and exclusion of religious moral views from debates over public policy. The attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse in democratic societies is a subtle trend, but one that needs to be watched. Not only does it deny Christian believers a rightful participation in politics but it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance.

Too often in the media and public discourse there are episodes of disparagement of, or incitement against Christians or Christianity: the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching are ridiculed and there are TV programs or videos on YouTube that show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols. There is no contrast between religious freedom and freedom of expression in so far as the freedom of expression is not abused to gratuitously offend the religions. In order to promote tolerance and non-discrimination the OSCE and its participating States should protect all religions – also the majority ones – from prejudices and negative stereotypes and adopt practical measures to assure that the media as well as the political and public discourse are respectful for religions, their representatives, teaching and symbols. This will allow the public opinion to develop in a correct, mature way and it will foster a climate of mutual confidence and respect between religious communities as well as between believers and non-believers.

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