



**Associazione culturale “Giuseppe Dossetti: i Valori”
TUTELA E SVILUPPO DEI DIRITTI**

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

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Religious discrimination is one of the last prejudices to receive governmental attention and offences against Christians are probably the last form of religious intolerance to become a public issue. But intolerance and discrimination against Christians should not be underestimated. In West of Vienna there seems to be a tendency to play down intolerance toward Christians, because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion. However, nowadays restrictions and intolerance against Christians take place also in the Western World, where Christianity remains a majority religion.

In particular, attention must be given to 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, it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance. Christian leaders of different Churches and religious communities often complain about this and the OSCE and its participating States should pay attention to this.

The OSCE and its participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and pluralistic society should relegate to the realm of private opinion its members' religious beliefs and the moral convictions which derive from faith. In the Bucharest Conference it was stressed that whenever religious communities express concerns regarding legal or administrative provisions or propose alternative initiatives, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance by these groups, unless these groups – instead of proposing – cross a line and become coercive. Vice versa was noted that it would be intolerant to seek to prevent the member of these communities from acting consistently with their own moral



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convictions or denigrate them just because they propose different options.

At times in some OSCE participating States undue pressure is brought to bear upon those who work in Public Administration in contrast with their freedom to behave with dictates of their own conscience. Medical practitioners or secretaries have been sacked for refusing deal with an abortion on the ground of their conscientious objection. Marriage commissioners were instructed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies or else resign their posts.

In the media and the public discourse there are episodes of disparagement of, or incitement against Christians. Christianity, especially the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching not rarely are ridiculed in the media and in the public discourse. These are sometimes marked also by disinformation.

There are cartoon series or TV programs that ridicule the Christian faith or show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols. In some cases, demonstrations against homophobia become aggressive shows of intolerance against the Catholic Church where insults and hate speeches against the Church and Pope are shouted.

All religions – also the majority ones – should be protected from manipulation of their teachings and inaccurate or disrespectful presentation of their members and backgrounds. It is also necessary to guarantee that the media and the public discourse are respectful for religions, their teachings and symbols.

Christianity is the majority religion of many OSCE Participating Countries; indeed it has remarked the history, identity, culture and social life of their people. The specific contribution of Christians to the building and well-being of our democratic systems is an added value for society. Only the acknowledgment of this contribution can be a guarantee and an expression of true pluralism.

Therefore the Observatory that I represent urges the OSCE participating States to adopt effective and tailor made commitments, particularly in the next Ministerial Council Decisions, to firmly combat discrimination and intolerance against Christians, especially in the field of education, in the media, in public discourse and in the fight against hate crimes. My Observatory



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also urges ODIHR to continue to monitor and report the recurring episodes of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, not only East by also West of Vienna.

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