

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working session 16 (specifically selected topic): Combating racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination

As delivered by

Mr. Davit Knyazyan, Deputy Head of the Permanent Delegation of Armenia to the OSCE

Ms. Moderator,

Tolerance and non-discrimination and effective fight against hate crimes are possible only in the framework of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Hate crimes on ethnic and religious grounds, especially when promoted at state level constitute serious security threat. If not addressed at an early stage, they may lead to crimes against humanity and atrocities.

We are facing an alarming situation in our region, when racist and xenophobic public discourse and open encouragement of hate crimes is a state policy by the highest political leadership of Azerbaijan. In the conducive environment of absence of free media, restrictions against civil society and silencing critical voices anti-Armenian state propaganda leads to radicalization of society, in particular youth. The harsh reality is that the ruling elite in Azerbaijan derives its legitimacy by promoting identity based xenophobia targeting Armenians.

Promotion of xenophobia and intolerance in Azerbaijan is of systemic nature and incorporated in the education system. Video from a state kindergarten in Baku when the tutor teaches children that Armenians are enemies is a case to the point. Rare initiatives on reconciliation by some individuals or organizations are publicly condoned and silenced.

ECRI, the international monitoring body of Council of Europe, consistently highlighted in its country specific reports the wide-spread negative official and media discourse in Azerbaijan and called upon Azerbaijani authorities to take appropriate measures in addressing daily discrimination and hate speech against Armenians.

OSCE institutions need to fully utilize their early warning mandate through hate crime reporting, monitoring of cases of hate speech in media. The methodology used by ODIHR in gathering and reporting hate crimes is not conducive for identifying those hate crimes which may represent eminent threat to the security in the OSCE area. The challenges of radicalization, extremism and hate crimes remain unaddressed.

We recommend the ODIHR to raise the efficiency of hate crime reporting tool with the view to address hate crimes, constituting security threat. Education materials should become subject of monitoring in context of addressing radicalization of youth.

The Office of the RFOM should monitor media against hate speech targeting ethnic and religious groups.

Thank You.