

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
“Giuseppe Dossetti”
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

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Before speaking about intolerance on religious grounds, I would draw your attention on the fact that commitments on preventing and combating religious intolerance and discrimination cannot be considered apart from the longstanding commitments on freedom of religion or belief.

One of the main lessons learned from Tirana Conference is that implementation of religious tolerance and non-discrimination goes hand in hand with respect for religious freedom. On the other hand, tolerance and non-discrimination cannot be used or interpreted in a way that could restrict freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and all other fundamental freedoms: freedom cannot be sacrificed on the altar of tolerance.

Another lesson learned from Tirana Conference is that it has become out-dated to talk about minority and majority communities. As it was already pointed out by the Ministerial Council Decision No. 9/09, episodes of intolerance and discrimination affect both of them. A hierarchical approach – implying that acts against majority groups are less serious than those against minorities – would be improper: the inherent dignity of the human person is equally violated.

That being said, the situation of Christian communities in the OSCE Region is serious and in some cases may constitute a real threat to security. Especially East of Vienna there are recurring hate-motivated incidents and hate crimes against Christian properties or individuals that can even result in the murder of individuals. Profanation of Christian cemeteries and churches is a daily reality both East and West of Vienna.

West of Vienna anti-Christianism appears as the last acceptable prejudice and seems to receive less attention than other forms of intolerance because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion.

Education is one of the key ways to promote tolerance and non-discrimination in our societies. Therefore the ODIHR may develop Guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Christians, as it has already done with regard to intolerance and discrimination against other religious groups.

Attention should be drawn also to denial of Christian Churches' public role and to the attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse. Not only does it deny a rightful participation in politics but it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance. According to Principle 16 of Vienna 1989 Concluding Document and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/13 participating States should include religious communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media. Consequently participating States should welcome the interventions of representatives of religious communities that give their view – based on moral convictions deriving from faith – about everyday's life and, in particular, on legislative and administrative provisions of their Countries.

Christianity is the majority religion of many OSCE participating States; indeed it has remarked the history, identity, culture and social life of their people. Only the acknowledgment of its specific contribution to the building and well-being of our democratic societies can be a guarantee and an expression of true pluralism.

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