



OSCE

HDIM Meeting, 14 September 2017 (Warsaw)

Discrimination against non believers

Esteemed Chairpersons,

distinguished representatives,

this session is largely devoted to the very serious issue of discrimination and persecution based upon religious belief or on the assumption of the religious affiliation of the victims.

I would like to raise a much less discussed kind of discrimination, and sometimes, if possible, an even more ferocious kind of persecution: that against committed non believers, atheists, free-thinkers, and against individuals that have a life stance incompatible with the views of the religious majority existing in their countries or communities, beginning with LGBT persons.

Actually, the persecution of these minorities in some countries is even more systematic, certainly not less cruel – and is even less cause for controversy – than that of Christians. The periodic survey compiled by the International Ethical and Humanist Union, the Freedom of Thought Report, provides an appalling documentation of this reality.

Even in our own countries, and despite OSCE decisions and declarations, international obligations and constitutional provisions, often non believers, atheists, free-thinkers are not granted, at least, equal social dignity; and are often called to contribute, as tax-payers, to the preservation of beliefs that they do not share.

What is particularly hideous is the treatment many of our countries often reserve to those who sought refuge here precisely because they could accept no longer to conform to legally binding or community enforced religious obligations or to religious social conformity.

We often discuss the phenomenon of young Europeans of Christian or secular family origin who convert to authoritarian or fundamentalist brands of Islam. A similar and probably much more widespread phenomenon does exist in the opposite direction, but, due to family or communitarian pressure – and more concretely for fear of violent retaliation, hate crimes or even death – most of the concerned persons do not feel free to express their opinions, even after being granted refuge in our countries. Sometimes, a large portion of the welfare benefits provided for them is even channelled by our governments through religious bodies acting in the framework of some sort of “interreligious dialogue”.

As a result, those non believers, atheists, free-thinkers or LGBT persons assume that they must camouflage themselves in the great migration wave if they want to be safe. They came to know and love – much more than many of our fellow citizens and of many populist politicians – the basic principles and values of our common European constitutional heritage. Yet, until proven otherwise at their own risk, our governments and our societies assume that their place of birth determines their beliefs and allows arbitrary assumptions.

This attitude is also counterproductive. These individuals are among our best allies both against demagoguery and against all sort of fundamentalism. Even in the eyes of our public opinions, made anxious and fearful by political and media scaremongers, becoming more aware of the diversity actually existing among immigrants could ease tensions and provide a more realistic appreciation of the phenomenon. For the sanity of our public debate, this diversity deserves to be valorised, not concealed.

The European Humanist Federation would like to remind OSCE participating States that freedom of belief includes the freedom not to share any religious belief, that ethnicity is no indication of religious affiliation, and that the practice of ascribing or considering members of any religion, even for merely statistical purposes, individuals that never declared to have joined them is a breach to individual dignity and self-determination and is inconsistent with European values and principles.

Thank you.

Warsaw, 14 September 2017.