



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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In the OSCE area many persons and groups are subject to threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. The on-going global economic crisis exacerbates intolerance and discrimination, for example on grounds of property or social origin. Moreover, in our recent meetings it was highlighted that persons with disabilities too often suffer violations of their rights. So we should note with regret that manifestations of intolerance and discrimination occur daily, in different ways, from Vancouver to Ulaanbaatar.

Such episodes threaten the social cohesion inside each participating State, seriously affecting the group that is the victim. Some of them can also erode the confidence between States and trigger violence and conflict on a wider-scale. But it should be noted that not all forms of discrimination are able to threaten security. For example, the Danish Board of Equal Treatment recently fined a hair salon because a woman with a short haircut was requested from the salon to pay a surcharge to purchase an identical service to a man. This is certainly a discrimination but it does not seem a matter of concern for a security organization.

Therefore in accordance with its feature as a security organization and with its comprehensive and indivisible approach to security, the OSCE should develop a specific response to those phenomena that can undermine peace and stability of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region.

In this respect the situation of Christian communities in Western Balkans, Turkey, occupied territory of Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh may constitute a real threat to security of the OSCE Region. Moreover, 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. Profanations of Christian cemeteries and churches recently took place in several OSCE Countries



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both East and West of Vienna.

Primary responsibility rests with the participating States: it is not satisfactory that they do not commit violence themselves. Unfortunately this does not happen in several Countries where the religious communities are harassed by the police or by other governmental agencies, their members are in jail, their places of worship are arbitrarily searched and so on. The States have a duty to protect the individuals within their jurisdiction and punish the perpetrators. They should also assume all the initiatives necessary to prevent such crimes (for example educative programmes, awareness campaign and so on). Every time an hate crime occurs, we should ask whether the State has done its best to prevent *ex ante* the crime from being committed and not only to punish it *ex post*.

In Tirana Conference it was recognized 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.

Another lesson learned from Tirana Conference is that in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of human dimension commitments should be kept in mind. Commitments on preventing and combating religious intolerance and discrimination cannot be considered apart from the longstanding commitments on freedom of religion or belief: the implementation of religious tolerance and non-discrimination go hand in hand with the respect for religious freedom. If one of them is lacking, the other one cannot be fully achieved and vice versa. On the other hand, tolerance and non-discrimination commitments 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 to achieve tolerance.

Despite many commitments adopted in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination and appreciable efforts of the ODIHR as well as of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office, much work is still to be done. But I am confident that this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting will contribute to better understanding of new challenges and lead to appropriate responses.