



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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Session I: From Commitments to Implementation:
Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Area

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Despite many commitments related to freedom of religion or belief, in the OSCE Area – both East and West of Vienna – violations of this freedom still subsist against Churches and Christian communities, as well as their own members, not only where they are minority but also where they are majority. Therefore ODIHR and Participating States should avoid to consider violations against majority religions less serious than those against minority ones because such violations are serious *per se* and the OSCE commitments are referred to majority religions as well.

Especially East of Vienna there are recurring episodes of violence against properties or people: in particular the situation of the Christian community in Kosovo is a real threat for the security and stability of the Region. Too often these crimes happen without an adequate response from the participating States. In some cases even the police or other governmental agencies harass Churches and Christian communities. Undue restrictions also persist against import and distribution of religious material as well as there are visa restrictions for missionaries or volunteers.

More and more frequently in the OSCE Area medical practitioners or secretaries are sacked for refusing to deal with an abortion; marriage commissioners are instructed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies or else resign their posts and so on. The existing OSCE commitments recognize the conscientious objection only to military service but nowadays the participating States should guarantee the right of conscientious objection also to other ethical sensitive questions (as abortion, same sex marriage, children adoption by homosexuals, research on human embryo *et cetera*) in regard to the fact that religious freedom includes, *inter alia*, the right to live and act in accordance with the dictates of the conscience.

Moreover the OSCE participating States not always respect the right of parents to ensure the religious



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and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. For example, children should not be forced to a compulsory sexual, religious or ethical teaching which can be not consistent with the convictions of the children’s parents: in this case participating States should provide non-discriminatory opt-out possibilities.

In fine, there are recurring 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. There are TV programs or videos on YouTube that show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols. All religions – also the majority ones – should be protected from incorrect or disrespectful portrayal of their members or backgrounds and the participating States should adopt practical measures to assure that the media and the public discourse are respectful for religions, their representatives, teaching and symbols. At this regard the joint declaration on defamation of religions adopted also by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is unacceptable because – among other things – it denies the idea of defamation of religions.

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