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INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Anti-Semitism, Christianophobia and Islamophobia are dangerous forms of racism rising against the backdrop of ardent proclamations from governments and religious leaders to strengthen interfaith and intercivilizational dialogue and to advocate greater religious and cultural tolerance. And yet, research studies and public polls consistently report a steady rise in discrimination, social hostility and harassment on religious and ethnic grounds in many countries of the OSCE region.

The Russian Federation faces serious threats due to the rising number of neo-Nazi followers, growing anti-Semitism, and the notoriety of xenophobic public sentiments paired with physical violence. This situation is undermining the social paradigm of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

Recurrent warning comparisons made by Russian and foreign NGOs of contemporary Russia to Germany in 1930s are being proudly taken up by Russian nationalistic groups and parties. Prominent members of Russia's political parties (Rodina – "Motherland" and the Communist Party of Russia) participate in public demonstrations under the slogan "Russia for Russians." Both membership and the number of youth groups subscribing to neo-Nazi and Ku-Klux-Klan ideological platforms are escalating, overlooked by the government and often ignored by local authorities. In addition to the rising number of nationalist groups, the legal system contributes to the thriving environment of racism and xenophobia in Russia: many racially motivated crimes have been relegated by judges as instances of hooliganism, which entails a more lenient punishment. Rapid growth of anti-Semitism in Russia has resulted in a series of assaults on Jews across the Russian Federation, culminating in an attack on believers in a Moscow synagogue in January 2006. Russian cities are becoming breeding grounds for racism and ethnic hatred, as demonstrated in racially motivated murders of foreign students in St. Petersburg and Voronezh and regular targeting of students from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Ethnic violence, directed at migrant workers from the 'near abroad' and ethnic non-Russians, especially street and market vendors, is exemplified by the case of a bomb explosion at the Cherkizovsky Market in Moscow earlier this year. The government has contributed to this environment by not taking strong action to investigate and respectively prosecute culprits of hate crimes.

The alarming revival of anti-Semitism in Europe, marked by the doubling of cases of reported harassment and assault compared to previous years, not only begs the question of effectiveness of state policies on protection of ethnic and religious minorities, but also raises a more critical concern of a large-scale societal shift away from democratic and pluralistic liberal values.

Belgium, France, Germany, and Great Britain have the highest records of growing anti-Semitism incidents in Europe. The new nature of anti-Semitism in Western Europe, as well as in some Mediterranean OSCE partners such as Morocco and Egypt, is induced and molded by the situation in the Middle East, as the majority of incidents are perpetrated by Muslim youth groups espousing extremist ideology, whereas the character of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and Russia resembles the nationalist ideologies of the early twentieth century.

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy is particularly concerned with the anti-Semitic rhetoric originating from religious leaders. Radio Maryja of Poland, one of the most popular radio stations in the country, is notorious for its hateful and disparaging diatribes against Jews. Run by a catholic priest, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the impact of the radio programs is difficult to measure. However, the unabating popularity of Radio Maryja among the populace, as well as the strong electorate vote for the political parties that the radio station supports, is a worrisome indication of a strong anti-Semitic trend in Poland.

Islamophobia remains a valid concern in countries of Western Europe that continue to receive the largest number of Muslim emigrants from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe. Great Britain, France, and Germany experience the highest number of social clashes between Muslim and non-Muslim segments of their population. The Institute on Religion and Public Policy strongly believes that one of the measures to address Islamophobia is continued public education on differentiation of acts of violence committed by extremists using religion as justification for their actions from religious teachings and followers of Islam. We urge governments and religious leaders to implement educational programs on teachings of peace and mutual respect to effectively address the issue of Islamophobia- as well as anti-Semitism and Christianophobia.

The continued pursuit of militant secularism by a few governments of Western Europe- whose aim appears to be freedom *from* religion and not freedom *of religion* - creates a perilous situation for future generations. The growing alarm of anti-Christian sentiments in Europe, given the historical contribution of Christianity in cultural, political and social development of humankind, will lead to potentially greater rifts between various enclaves and communities in Europe.

The Resolution of the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, stressed that “extremism, fanaticism and distorted religious ideologies find no justification in genuine religion and that the vocation of all religious demands the refusal of violence and appeals to respect and peaceful co-existence with peoples and faiths.” The Institute commends the noble initiative of the government of Kazakhstan to advance inter-religious dialogue, but believes that the remedy to the steadily rising hostilities among religious and ethnic communities is captured not in a public discourse of leaders – although it is a vital first step – but in educating the populace through state and religion instituted educational programs and implementation of practical measures within communities that would foster spirit and culture of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Institute on Religion and Public Policy would like to make the following recommendations in regard to practical measures to address the issues of intolerance and discrimination:

- 1) That the mandate of the Special Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance against Christians and members of other religions should be modified. The mandate of this Special Representative is extremely broad, making it difficult for one person to effectively and timely address all the issues that are currently assigned to the Special Representative. In order to guarantee the greater protection and promotion of fundamental rights, the Institute strongly recommends that the mandate for Intolerance against Christians and

members of other religions be carved out of the current position and established as a separate and independent mandate;

2) That more resources be allocated to the Tolerance and non-Discrimination Program at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to progressively implement educational programs and promote respect, understanding and combat prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination against religions;

3) To promote awareness among OSCE participating states regarding the increasing prejudice and hostility against Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Discrimination or intolerance directed at any religion carries the danger to trigger hostility and bigotry towards all others. Stereotyping or prejudice against any religion should be neither encouraged, tolerated nor promoted by countries of the OSCE region;

Furthermore, the Chairman in Office, ODIHR, and each of the Special Representatives are encouraged to undertake the following in order to advance the fight against religious discrimination within the OSCE region:

4) Identify OSCE countries that systematically engage in serious discrimination;

5) Write on-site country reports on specific executive and legislation improvements necessary to comply with OSCE standards;

6) Arrange for an annual conference with religious groups and NGOs to discuss countries of concern and approaches to solve problems of Xenophobia and religious discrimination;

7) Arrange for a bi-annual ministerial-level conference on religious intolerance and discrimination in all three areas;

8) Expand positions to establish full-time, permanent 4-year mandates, subject to renewal;

9) Publication of annual thematic reports on Media, Education, Legislation for countries' fulfillment of OSCE standards on religious discrimination and xenophobia;

10) Establish close cooperation with an external group of experts on religious freedom to promote OSCE standards and find new approaches and practical steps to compliance in order to combat religious discrimination;

11) Hire full time aides on the religious discrimination issues to meet with religious groups, interfaith groups, governments, NGOs and draft reports, to be paid by interested participating States and interested NGOs;

12) Hold a Cordoba-style conference on religious freedom;

13) Encourage participating states to appoint a high level official at Ministerial level or in the office of the Head of Government to dialogue and cooperate with religious groups and NGOs in an attempt to mediate concerns or disputes, with the Special representative facilitating such dialogue.