

**Committee against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) – OSCE review conference –  
Warsaw October 2010.  
Working Session 2**

Every OSCE conference is a new occasion to raise some of the most critical issues the civil society faces on a daily basis. For NGOs, it is a great occasion to express our concerns and offer some ideas on how to tackle issues.

To be honest, we are under the impression that some countries use this assembly as an audience to claim how tolerant they are and how important they consider fundamental freedoms to be, repeating the same sentences from a conference to the next one.

Still, when it comes to implementing these claims, there is a huge discrepancy between the speech and the action.

Freedom of religion is one of these ideas being threatened, especially if you are a Muslim living in the West.

One of ODIHR's missions is to help protect and develop freedom of faith within the OSCE region, but we clearly see, specifically in France, that instead of widening the freedom of thought and religion, we are restricting it more and more. And these restrictions are usually targeting the Muslim community.

The government wants to tell us what it is to be or not to be French.

They want to tell us how we can or cannot dress in the public space.

Some even want to cancel our nationality if we don't approve their extreme vision of secularism.

To what country can we be expelled after three generations of being French?

Also, there is an alarming long term dynamic at work in Western Europe. Over the years, we are witnessing a transfer of extremist and intolerant ideas from the far right nationalists to the mainstream parties. Ideas that would have been considered racist, discriminatory and intolerant in the 80's are now considered acceptable.

Such ideas are not expressed against racial groups anymore but against religious groups, in the name of secularism, laïcité and for the sake of so called national identity.

Extreme manifestations of such ideas can be found in France or Netherlands, for instance.

In Netherlands, mainstream parties have accepted a partnership with an extremist party, which openly embraces the fight against Islam as the cornerstone of its foundation. It is not the wisest of trades to grant such extremist the legitimacy of being a partner with the government in exchange for power.

In France, if the Front National has been defeated during national elections, their great victory has been to spread their ideas in the wider society, to the extent where the current government's politics is deeply influenced by it. Every now and then, Muslims are being used as scapegoats and as diversions from the problems our country is facing: unable to deal with unemployment, the government starts a debate on national identity. Incapable of bringing the citizen together, the government tries to divide us on issues like burka. The same method is used every time: focus on an epiphenomenon to avoid dealing with the real issues.

Still, there is hope: the minister of interior has put in place a task force to monitor anti-Muslim hate crimes, but this needs to be done in a much more systematic manner and in cooperation with field organisations who have been doing this for more than five years now.

Also, previous reports from the national council from human rights (CNCDH), the high commission against discrimination (HALDE), ODIHR and the European council (ECRI) have raised the issue of islamophobia to an unprecedented level. At some point, this will have to be taken into account by the government.

For these reasons, and to start a constructive process, we propose some recommendations:

- Adopt a working definition of Islamophobia, according to what has been discussed during the June conference in Astana
- Develop partnership with ODIHR to increase awareness on hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims
- Adopt a ministerial decision to take legal action specifically against Islamophobia, applicable at a country level
- ODIHR should dedicate some efforts specifically focusing on anti-Muslim hate in the West
- Organise a round table meeting on this issue in 2011.

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