



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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Religion-based intolerance and discrimination have received attention only since a few years. We all view with appreciation the efforts of the ODIHR and of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office to combat such phenomena. But much work is still to be done. Therefore should be paid more attention to fulfil the existing commitments instead to other concerns out the boundaries of the OSCE *acquis* that are not matters of concern of the OSCE because not relevant for the security and stability of the Region.

Especially East of Vienna there are recurring hate-motivated incidents and hate crimes against Christian properties or people, including murders. The situation of Christian communities in Kosovo and Turkey is a real threat to security of the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian Region and may give rise to conflict and violence on a wider-scale. Profanations of Christian cemeteries and churches recently took place in several OSCE Countries both East and West of Vienna. Primary responsibility rests with the participating States: it is not satisfactory that violence does not derive from the States, since public authorities have the duty to actively support and protect the religious freedom of their citizens. Regrettably in some case even the police or other governmental agencies harass Churches and Christian communities.

West of Vienna anti-Christianism appears as the last acceptable prejudice and seems to receive less attention than other forms of intolerance because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion. But we should bear in mind that OSCE commitments – as well as other international relevant instruments – protect minority religions as well as majority ones.

The OSCE and its participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and pluralistic society have to remove the religion and its symbols from public life of citizens. The UN Rapporteur



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on freedom of religion or belief, in the last Statement to the UN Human Rights Council, said that "it's regrettable that societies with high level of income and education have openly expressed their aversion to see religious symbols in public".

It is also more and more widespread the false idea that religions are a negative fact instead a positive factor for building and well-being of our democracies. If the freedom of religion or belief rightly protects also the non-believers, an anti-religious atheism which preaches the need to remove the religion from public life should not be welcomed. A similar approach would be at odds with the very concept of religious freedom provided by the OSCE commitments, which protect the religious phenomenon as such. At this regard I find appropriate to remember that during the Follow-up Meeting of Vienna it was not reached the *consensus* on the proposal WT.78 that would put the right of practicing religion on the same footing of the preaching of atheism

Attention should be drawn to denial of Christian Churches' public role and to the attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse. Not only does it deny a rightful participation in politics but it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance.

According to Principle 16 of Vienna 1989 Concluding Document the OSCE and its participating States should engage in consultations with religious communities and promote the participation of these communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media. Consequently participating States should welcome the interventions of the representatives of religious communities that give their view – based on moral convictions deriving from faith – about everyday's life and, in particular, on legislative and administrative provisions of their Countries. Unless instead of proposing the religious communities become coercive or incite to violence, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance because they exercise their right to religious freedom, in particular the right of religious teaching.

Too often in publications, popular music, Internet, public demonstrations there are episodes of incorrect portrayal, disparagement of, or incitement against Christians or Christianity: especially the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching are ridiculed. There are also TV programs or videos on YouTube that show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols. In order to promote tolerance and non-discrimination the OSCE and its participating States should protect all religions – also the majority ones – from prejudices and negative stereotypes and adopt practical measures to assure that media as well as the political and public discourse are respectful for religions, their



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representatives, teaching and symbols. This will allow the public opinion to develop in a correct, mature way and it will foster a climate of mutual confidence and respect between religious communities as well as between believers and non-believers.

The ODIHR and the Participating States should pay more attention to the episodes above mentioned in the questionnaire collecting data from national data collection point. Moreover in training of law enforcement agencies, media and civil society the ODIHR should consider carefully these hate crimes also if perpetrated against majority religions.

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