

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019
Statement submitted by European Humanist Federation

The European Humanist Federation has reviewed with great interest the ODIHR publication "Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidelines", in which the authors try to define a reasonable middle ground between ensuring the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion to all individuals on one hand, and answering the security concerns related to acts of violence and terrorism committed by some groups of people motivated by their beliefs, on the other hand.

We endorse the guiding principles from the Chapter 3 of the ODIHR Guidelines and are pleased to notice the following statements in the document:

1. The freedom of religion or belief applies equally to men and women.
2. The right to have no belief, the right to have a non-theistic or atheistic belief, and the right to change one's belief are equally protected under the article 18 of the UDHR (which has often been misinterpreted by some of the religious organisations and politicians).

In EHF we believe that ensuring freedom of religion or belief, as well as for other human rights and civil liberties is integral to ensuring security. We also believe that the only way to create conditions for a peaceful coexistence of several groups of people whose beliefs and whose needs (resulting from their beliefs) often contradict each other, is through establishing a secular legislation system which doesn't favour any of these groups and ensures equal treatment and equal liberties to all of them: liberties which are not infinite, but which are all equally limited, to ensure respect to other citizens and their lifestyles.

Therefore, we urge all the OSCE participating states to take immediate action towards developing secularism in their countries, as well as addressing the numerous issues of discrimination of non-believers and of minority religions. I can see here representatives of several states in which one state church or one majority religion is clearly privileged over others, where children are taught at public schools that only one religion gives correct answers to universal questions, where changing one's belief is not possible or very hard, where criticising some beliefs is a common thing and criticising others is punishable by law. Let us also remember that discrimination is a wide phenomenon and that followers of minority religions are able and sometimes willing to discriminate too, in spite of being persecuted themselves. There are instances of intolerance between followers of different minority religions and persecutions of those individuals who have changed their belief and wish to escape their former religious community.

If only all the OSCE participating states decided to fully endorse "Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidelines", decided to work towards secularisation and remembered that the right to freedom of religion or belief is meant to protect individuals and not communities, our countries would soon become a better place to live.