



European Network of Communities
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to the

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Freedom of Religion or Belief, fostering mutual Respect and
Understanding**

**Session III: Freedom of Religion or Belief and fostering mutual respect
and understanding through dialogue and cooperation between
authorities, religious and belief communities and civil society**

Vienna, 3 July 2015

As the European Network of Communities we see that it is essential to have dialogue between authorities, religious communities and civil society in a way where it is possible to discuss issues openly.

There is a key ingredient for this dialogue: Respect.
Respect towards religious feelings, and to not ridicule religion or belief.

However particularly in States West of Vienna such as Spain and the UK the extension of Anti-Discrimination legislation is putting pressure on religious communities, specifically as Anti-Discrimination legislation has been extended to the area of goods and services. As an example: Refusing to bake a cake with controversial motives on the cake, or refusing to host a party that the owner of a restaurant does not want to support for religious reasons have resulted in fines for the bakery and the restaurant owner.

This is quite problematic, as the state has been starting to regulate the behavior of citizens between each-other. Instead of gaining additional freedom as one would expect, Anti-Discrimination legislation has been starting to limit

religious freedom.

Believers being threatened by Anti-Discrimination legislation would have a tendency to be less open to dialogue and cooperation with state authorities, if they want to follow their belief and conscience and still not be taken to court. Such an atmosphere is making dialogue difficult. Especially when religious and faith communities see themselves forced to hide their true motives because of the fear being taken to court.

In order to prevent limitations for religious freedom in Western European states we advise that Anti-Discrimination legislation is not extended to the area of goods and services.

We observe another worrying tendency: Some states start interfering with the parental right to educate their children. Especially in countries West of Vienna we are facing sex-education being forced into schools and kindergarten. In some cases this includes practical sexual exercises. This goes against the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religion or belief.

Therefore we recommend to the participating states:

- to encourage (but not to control) dialogue between religious and belief communities, by creating a non-threatening environment for religious communities, where it is possible to speak openly
- to protect the parental right for parents to raise their children in accordance with their religion or belief.
- not to extend Anti-Discrimination legislation to the area of goods and services, as it will do damage to religious freedom
- to contribute towards creating an atmosphere of respect – where religion is not ridiculed, but dealt with in a respectful way

We recommend to OSCE/ODIHR:

- to consider adopting a resolution on parental rights
- to study the issue of parental rights in the context of religious freedom