

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Policies and Strategies to Further Promote Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
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Session I: Challenges to Realizing Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Root Causes and Consequences

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From Vancouver to Vladivostok no part of the OSCE area is immune from manifestations of intolerance and discrimination. Many persons and groups are subject to threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. New forms of intolerance and discrimination, based also on the ground of property or social origin, are fuelled by the ongoing global economic crisis and the migrants' flows, while persons with disabilities too often suffer violations of their rights.

Such episodes threaten the social cohesion inside each participating State, but some of them can also erode the confidence between States and trigger violence and conflict on a wider-scale. In accordance with its feature as a security organization and with its comprehensive and indivisible approach to security, the OSCE need to focus on the response to those phenomena that are able to undermine peace and stability.

As it was recognized by the Ministerial Council Decision No. 9/09, these episodes affect both minority and majority communities. In this respect it should be noted that a hierarchical approach – implying that acts against majority groups are less serious than those against minorities – would be improper: in both cases the inherent dignity of the human person is equally hurt. In this regard, the recent appointment by the EU Commission of a coordinator on combating antisemitism and a coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred is certainly very appreciable but it should be noted with regret that discrimination and intolerance against Christians and members of other religions are not equally taken into account by the EU Commission's strategy to combat hate crime, hate speech, intolerance and discrimination.

Moreover, in accordance with indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of human rights, commitments on preventing and combating religious intolerance and non-discrimination cannot be considered apart from the longstanding OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief: tolerance cannot be an *alibi* for denying or not guaranteeing

religious freedom.

On the other hand, tolerance and non-discrimination cannot be used or interpreted in a way that could restrict freedom of religion or belief or other fundamental freedoms: freedom cannot be sacrificed on the altar of tolerance. But the anti-discrimination legislation of certain participating States seem to be in contrast with the relevant OSCE commitments, because do not take into consideration and ensure the autonomy of Christian communities, preventing these to organize themselves and to act in accordance with their beliefs and interests.

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. In a more general way it is widespread the false idea that religions are a negative fact instead a positive factor for building and well-being of our democracies.

At this regard it should be noted that if 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. Let me remember that during the CSCE 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 that asks to eradicate and prevent the propagation of religion.

According to such growing opposition to the public role of religion, religiously inspired behaviours should have no room in our societies with the consequence that individuals are prevented to live and act in accordance with the dictates of their conscience, a right which was recognised already by the Helsinki Final Act.

Christianity is the majority religion of many OSCE participating States; indeed it has remarked the history, identity, culture and social life of their people. Only the acknowledgment of its specific contribution to the building and well-being of our democratic societies can further promote tolerance and non-discrimination.