



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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**Session 2: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians
and members of other religions**

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In the OSCE Area Christians suffer intolerance, discrimination and violation of religious freedom both East and West of Vienna, not only where they are a minority, but also where they are a majority.

Especially East of Vienna there are recurring hate-motivated incidents and hate crimes against Christian properties or individuals, that can even result in the murder of individuals. In this respect the situation of Christian communities in Balkans, Turkey and Cyprus may undermine security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region.

In the same area, undue restrictions against the registration of Churches remain a daily reality: civil authorities arbitrarily do not recognize the legal personality of Christian communities and these are therefore subjected to a number of limitations stemming from the lack of legal personality (such as acquiring property for a place of worship or establishing educational institutions for training clergy and so forth). Undue restrictions persist also against the importation and distribution of religious material as well as against visas for missionaries or volunteers, so that legitimate proselytism is strongly constrained.

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



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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. I find appropriate to 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 –.

For example existing OSCE commitments recognize the conscientious objection only to military service but nowadays participating States should also guarantee the right of conscientious objection to other morally sensitive matters (such as services related to health-care and education), provided that the rights of others to be free from discrimination are respected and that the access to lawful services is guaranteed. In our pluralistic societies conscientious objection is crucial to permit a coexistence of values: in fact in this manner people who do not subscribe to certain majority views are fully entitled to coexist with those who do. In the same way participating States should respect the autonomy of religious communities, granting to all religious entities to organize themselves and act in accordance with their beliefs and interests.

Attention should be drawn also 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 leaders 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



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right of religious teaching.

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 be a guarantee and an expression of true pluralism.

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