

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Keynote at OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Tirana, Albania

Keynote Address by Dr Gudrun Kugler on behalf of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Session 2 on May 21.

This year, we celebrate 1700 years of the Edict of Milan granting Freedom of Religion to a then rather surprised Roman Empire. 2010's special representative of the chair in office working on Christianity, Massimo Introvigne, said that worldwide, every five minutes, a Christian dies for his or her faith.

Today I would like to invite you to take a specific look at the phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the OSCE area:

OSCE had hosted numerous meetings on this topic. To name a few:

- „The Role of Civil Society in Combating Hate Crimes against Christians“ in Rome in June 2012.
- OSCE High-Level Meeting on Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians, in September 2011
- OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Resolution on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in the OSCE area, adopted in Belgrade in July 2011
- Expert Round Table on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Vienna in 2009.
- ODIHRs annual hate crime report

But OSCE is not alone in drawing attention to the issue: **In the European Parliament**, events took place on this issue in 2011 and 2012.

The Parl. Assembly of the Council of Europe deplores psychological violence and negative stereotyping in its resolution: „Safeguarding human rights in relation to religion and belief and protecting religious communities from violence“ (Resolution 1928, 2013) (I will quote this resolution further a little bit later.)

Back to the Edict of Milan: The Edict of Milan grants „to Christians and others the full authority to observe that religion which each preferred“ in order to promote „peace and support the common good“. For emperor Constantine, this meant that religious

observance had to be „free and open“ and „without molestation“ and „without conditions“.

Can we wholeheartedly confirm that in the OSCE area we have achieved the goals set in 313 and numerous OSCE commitments?

Let me briefly mention the commitments of Helsinki in 1975, Madrid 1983, Vienna 1989, Copenhagen 1990, Budapest 1994, Maastricht 2003, and Astana 2010. The Astana Commemorative Declaration says: „Greater efforts must be made to promote freedom of religion or belief and to combat intolerance and discrimination.”

- In some parts East of Vienna, Christian missionaries experience difficulties obtaining visas; Christians report impediments to train clergy and teach religion to children.
- West of Vienna, my organisation researched and documented 800 cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the last five years. You can view them all on our website IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu. We documented hate crimes and hate incidents, negative stereotyping and exclusion, but we also looked at legal restrictions effecting Christians.

Unfortunately, with regard to the situation of Christians West of Vienna there is a problem of underreporting, not only by the people themselves, but also by the governments. However, there is one ComRes study in the UK, which concluded in 2011 that:

74% of surveyed Christians feel: „There is more negative discrimination against Christians than people of other faiths.“

More than 60% feel that the marginalisation of Christians is increasing in the government, in the workplace (61%), and in the public (68%).

71% perceive an increase in the marginalisation of Christians in the media.

In a survey we did with experts, we documented 41 laws which effects Christians West of Vienna adversely, in a report launched this week. These restrictions are largely found in the areas of Freedom of Conscience, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Assembly, Private Autonomy and Parental Rights. You can download the report from our website.

- It does matter, if a Christian can wear a religion symbol in public and mention his or her faith in a private conversation at work.
- Or if a Christian caretaker or medical doctor is forced to do things he holds to be unethical.
- Or if a Christian entrepreneur is forced to deliver services against his or her conscience.
- Or if Christian parents can not opt their children out of mandatory sexuality education which might stand in direct opposition to their convictions.

UK based intellectual Ann Widdecomb spoke just a few days ago of a „small scale persecution“ and said „If the small beginnings are not resisted then they grow into something bigger.“

Emperor Constantine dedicates a large part of his edict to securing places of assembly and worship for Christians, including the restitution of formerly seized properties.

- West of Vienna we see a rising number of Vandalism: For example, 84% of vandalism in France in 2010 was directed against Christian sites, said the then French Ministre de l'intérieur in a letter to the Council of Europe).
- East of Vienna, Church registration, acquisition and protection of church property is often not guaranteed.

Sometimes I get asked, how can a majority be discriminated against? Well, it is not the nominal Christian who is fully aligned to society's mainstream, who suffers discrimination. It is those to strive to live according to the high ethical demands of Christianity, who experience a clash. Those are not the majority. And even if they were: History has shown that a leading minority can discriminate against a peaceful majority, as we saw in the striking example of apartheid.

Where do we go from here?

OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly recommended in its Resolution on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in the OSCE area, adopted in Belgrade in July 2011:

that a "**public debate** on intolerance and discrimination against Christians be initiated and that the right of Christians to participate fully in public life be ensured" (12);

that „**legislation** in the participating States, including labour law, **equality law, laws on freedom of expression and assembly, and laws related to religious communities and right of conscientious objection be assessed**“ „in view of discrimination and intolerance against Christians," (13);

and it "encourages the media not to spread prejudices against Christians and to combat negative stereotyping" (15).

The PACE of the Council of Europe demanded just a few days ago almost unanimously to (in Resolution 1928):

- „**accommodate religious beliefs** in the public sphere“

- „**ensure the right to well-defined conscientious objection** in relation to morally sensitive matters“

- „**respect the right of parents** to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions;“

- „**change their legal regulations whenever these go against the freedom of association** for groups (including churches)“

Literally corresponding to the Edict of Milan, the Council of Europe „urges member States where the restitution of church property is not yet concluded, to speed up this process and finish it in the short or medium term.“ Let's hope it won't take 1700 years.

Let me personally add to these key recommendations:

- I think that Europe is ready for honest „reasonable accomodation“ when it comes to the clash between people of faith and a mainstream which seems to be at unease with religion.
- I ask you to be weary of horizontal equal treatment legislation: Such policies can inflict serious dilemmas on Christians.
- I recommend to participating states to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. In some countries, vandalism against a Christian site is only listed as vandalism against a public building.
- I recommend to OSCE to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate this through the OSCE region.
- Combating persecution of Christians outside the OSCE area must become a priority of the foreign secretaries of participating states in their foreign policy.

I thank the OSCE for taking up this issue – which is key to raise awareness and find solutions together. The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians offers our research and cooperation to you.

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