

The project

The Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights, on the initiative of the General Secretariat for Human Rights, co-operates with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (ODIHR) and participates in the European Commission's program "JUST/2015/RRAC/AG, Action grants to prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance, RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP/JUSTICE PROGRAMME (2014-2020)".

ODIHR's project "Building a Comprehensive Criminal Justice Response to Hate Crime" focuses on three major lines of action:

1. development of a national, inter-agency agreement on activities and policies to be implemented by relevant authorities and civil society to address hate crime;
2. improving recording of hate crimes;
3. training prosecutors to enhance their ability to address hate crime.

As part of the above mentioned project, the inter-agency agreement on addressing hate crime was signed on 6 June 2018 in Athens. Through this Agreement, the executive branch, the judicial branch and Civil Society joined their forces to combat hate crimes. This is a historical moment for the Hellenic Republic, saying, in **one strong voice, no to racism, intolerance and hate crimes**. The second activity of the project (improving recording of hate crimes) is still in progress. However, the judiciary has already materialized almost all of ODIHR's recommendations on the issue. Moreover, training of prosecutors has been conducted by ODIHR in cooperation with the Supreme Court Prosecutor, in the form of Training for Trainers.

Therefore, a multi-faceted approach was followed, which focused on Inter-institutional cooperation and coordination, on one hand, and institutional capacity building, on the other.

The outcome

The outcomes of the project are very significant. Inter-institutional cooperation has been established through a Working Group and the official commitment of all actors to combat hate crimes has been expressed. The judiciary has adopted important measures concerning recording of hate crimes. Moreover,

training seminars have been organized by the prosecutors who were trained by ODIHR, at their own initiative. I consider that the most important outcome of the project has been the fact that the fight against hate crimes has gone up on the agenda. I need to stress that combatting hate crime hasn't been prioritized in the same way by all actors involved and the level of their commitment varied considerably in the past. However, through the project, all stakeholders understood that combatting hate crimes demands joint action, even by actors that are not directly involved.

The role of ODIHR to the project

According to the actors who participated in the project, the entire process was guided by ODIHR. ODIHR's contribution was considered very constructive, giving structure to the process by placing an action plan in a timeframe, and steering its implementation.

Moreover, running the process under the aegis of ODIHR created trust on the part of the actors involved (the judiciary, the administration and civil society), as stakeholders saw ODIHR as a neutral actor, specialized in hate crime, experienced and knowledgeable about best practices internationally.

It is also worth stressing the prime importance of adjusting the available international input to national needs and expectations in order to maximize the chances of the successful incorporation of comparative best practices at national level. At this point the contribution of ODIHR has been very constructive.

What ODIHR brought to our project was expertise, international experience and this neutrality towards the administration, the judiciary and the civil society that was needed to gain trust. Moreover, it worked as a catalyst to speed up the process and to achieve a result. However, while ODIHR steered the process, it was obvious that their aim was to foster national authorities' leadership **on commitment to the fight against hate crimes** as a prerequisite for future implementation.

In short, our cooperation with ODIHR for the project was very constructive. I seize this opportunity to thank ODIHR's experts who worked on the project for all their assistance and cooperation. Their contribution to the effort to achieve our goals cannot be put into words.

How can OSCE be most effective in assisting participating states in implementing their human dimension commitments and facilitate policy change

The use of international and European funding tools is a very constructive way to assist states in implementing their human dimension commitments. ODIHR approached the Hellenic Ministry of Justice when drafting the proposal for the EU funding project and we were very happy to create together with ODIHR an ambitious proposal, adjusted of course to our needs. I believe that it was also useful that ODIHR was the leader to the project, because sometimes it is easier for national authorities to follow.

Another pivotal lesson from the project we implemented together with ODIHR is the unique usefulness of immediate, personal communication with highest-ranking institutional leadership in the advancement of any policy and practice. Political commitment has proved to be very crucial for our project and ODIHR's role to achieve this has been valuable. I also believe that the personal skills of ODIHR's project manager played an important role to achieve this practice.

Human dimension areas

Concerning the human dimension areas where OSCE can play an important role, I believe that Combating Acts Motivated by Prejudice, Intolerance and Hatred is an area where OSCE's institutions, namely ODIHR, can play a very important role to bring change in policy and practice. This is an area where ODIHR has obtained wide and in depth expertise. It can also transfer best practices between member states, having at its disposal a "network" of experts with great technical skills.

In conclusion, our cooperation with OSCE has shown that ODIHR's expertise and objectivity is really important for the success of programs concerning the promotion of human rights. Moreover, the use of international funding tools by OSCE can highly benefit the implementation of human dimension commitments.