



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 II: Status of Religious or Belief Communities

Statement by Dr. Mattia F. Ferrero  
Coordinator of the  
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom  
Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori”  
(Italy)

In the OSCE Area several undue restrictions remain against the registration of Churches and Christian communities. Sometimes it happens that, in the presence of a majority religion, civil authorities do not recognize the legal personality of Churches and these are subjected to limitations in other several issues often linked to acquiring legal personality as such acquiring property for a place of worship and other religious use; eligibility to establish educational institutions for training clergy; arranging visits and ministries in hospitals, prisons, and the military; and so forth.

Moreover the right of the religious communities to organize themselves according to their own hierarchical and institutional structure and the right to select, appoint and replace their personnel in accordance with their respective requirements and standards are not fully respected and there are undue interference of the civil authorities, as happened for example in the election of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

There seems also to be a tendency to play down intolerance toward Christians West of Vienna, because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion. Religion-based intolerance and discrimination have received attention only since a few years and anti-Christianism appears as the last acceptable prejudice. Attention must be given to denial of Christian Churches' public role and exclusion of religious moral views from debates over public policy.

According to Vienna 1989 Concluding Document, the OSCE and its participating States should engage in consultations with religious communities not only about the requirements of religious freedom but also about any matter of concern of these communities. They also should promote the participation of religious communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media, and welcome that religious communities express on the grounds of religious moral views concerns over legislative and administrative provisions.



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Unless these communities instead of proposing become coercive, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance by them because they exercise their right to religious freedom, in particular the right of religious teaching.

I also find appropriate to remember that during the 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. As was said yesterday – if the 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 and private life of the citizens should not be welcomed. A similar approach would be at odds with the very concept of religious freedom, which protects the religious phenomenon as such.

At this regard the ODIHR should raise the awareness on the positive contribution of the religious communities to the building and the well-being of our democratic societies.

**Dr. Mattia F. Ferrero**

Coordinator

Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori” - Observatory for Religious Freedom and Tolerance

Mail address:  
Corso Monforte, 2  
I-20122 MILANO  
ITALIA - ITALY

e-mail: [mattia.ferrero@unicatt.it](mailto:mattia.ferrero@unicatt.it)  
Phone: +39-02-89452122  
Fax: +39-02-89452125  
Mobile phone: +39-339-6938096