

Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) – OSCE review conference – Warsaw October 2011.

Every OSCE conference is a new occasion to raise some of the most critical issues the civil society faces on a daily basis. For NGOs, it is a great occasion to express our concerns and offer some ideas on how to tackle issues.

To be honest, we are under the impression that some countries use this assembly as an audience to claim how tolerant they are and how important they consider fundamental freedoms to be, repeating the same sentences from a conference to the next one.

Still, when it comes to implementing these claims, there is a huge discrepancy between the speech and the action.

Freedom of religion is one of these ideas being threatened, especially if you are a Muslim living in the West.

The French government, under Nicolas Sarkozy, wants to tell us what it is to be or not to be French.

They want to tell us how we can or cannot dress in the public space.

Some even want to cancel our nationality if we don't approve their extreme vision of secularism. We are now in the situation where right wing extremists dictate the mainstream political agenda of the country.

Also, there is an alarming long term dynamic at work in Western Europe. Over the years, we are witnessing a transfer of extremist and intolerant ideas from the far right nationalists to the mainstream parties. Ideas that would have been considered racist, discriminatory and intolerant in the 80's are now considered acceptable.

Such ideas are not expressed against racial groups anymore but against religious groups, in the name of secularism, laïcité and for the sake of so called national identity.

Extreme manifestations of such ideas can be found in France or Netherlands, for instance.

Every now and then, Muslims are being used as scapegoats and as diversions from the problems our country is facing: unable to deal with unemployment, the government starts a debate on national identity. Incapable of bringing the citizen together, the government tries to divide us on issues like the burka. The same method is used every time: focus on an epiphenomenon to avoid dealing with the real issues.

Still, there is hope: the minister of interior has put in place a task force to monitor anti-Muslim hate crimes, but this needs to be done in a much more systematic manner and in cooperation with field organisations who have been doing this for more than five years now.

Also, previous reports from the national council from human rights (CNCDDH), the high commission against discrimination (HALDE), ODIHR and the European council (ECRI) have

raised the issue of islamophobia to an unprecedented level. At some point, this will have to be taken into account by the government.

This year, we have worked in partnership with ODIHR and OSCE to organise an intense training for grassroots organisations. It was an unprecedented success.

We have also been awarded the UN special consultative status for our work against islamophobia.

This shows how seriously this issue is taken into account at the international level.

Still, at the local level, especially in France, a lot still needs to be done, starting with the fight against islamophobic speech in politics and the media, which is the starting point of the phenomenon.

For these reasons, and to start a constructive process, we propose some recommendations:

- focus on the conference organised in Vienna at the end of the month on this issue and support ODIHR's initiative
- implement concrete projects against hate speech and hate crimes during the upcoming Irish chairmanship
- Adopt a ministerial decision to take action specifically against hate speech, applicable at a country level
- ODIHR should dedicate some efforts specifically focusing on anti-Muslim hate in the West like it has been done for other minorities.

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