



EU Transparency Register
ID number: 015146319708-20

contact@freedomofbelief.net
pressoffice@freedomofbelief.net
spokesman@freedomofbelief.net
<https://freedomofbelief.net>

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019

Working session 13 : TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION II, including:

- Combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination
- Combating anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions

STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR FREEDOM OF BELIEF (FOB)

HATE SPEECH, FAKE NEWS AND THE FORB OF MINORITY GROUPS IN THE OSCE REGION: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN SHAPING SHARED VALUES AND STANDARDS

Tuesday, 24 September 2019

Good afternoon

I am Alessandro Amicarelli, a London based lawyer specializing in human rights and freedom of belief, and I am currently chairing the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB), that I represent today as I did the previous years.

Our organisation, the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB) has been attending the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings for the last 5 years, and we are thankful to the OSCE for the space given to the civil society.

As a secular entity, member of the International Religious Freedom Movement, we constantly cooperate with other like-minded organisations, both secular and faith based ones, and regularly carry out a constructive dialogue with the public bodies and representatives in different countries.

We appreciate and highlight the efforts of the United States of America, in the person of the Secretary of State the Hon. Mike Pompeo, and of all those with him, who had the vision to launch in 2018 the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion in the world, that is now an annual event.

After a successful First edition of the Ministerial in 2018, this year representatives of some 100 States and International organisations gathered in Washington DC for the Second edition of the Ministerial, that was attended by OSCE member States, and that saw several countries committing to improve freedom of religion in their territories.



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We support the view that honest dialogue based on mutual respect and factual knowledge, as well as freedom of speech based on correct information about minority groups are paramount in the democratic societies.

Some OSCE Member States, such as Italy, the United Kingdom, the USA, and few others have looked into legal ways and initiatives to prevent and stop the spreading of hatred via the internet and the social media, due to increased cases of hate speech and instigation to violence against members of minority groups, including also members of minority religions and spiritualities, yoga practitioners and followers of new, contemporary and non traditional faiths and beliefs.

The number of fake news created ad hoc by expert haters on the internet, and easily spreading via the social media, is an increasing and worrying phenomenon that is being targeted by the above-mentioned initiatives adopted by members States and whose aim is to protect members of minority groups from verbal and physical attacks and to protect the youth from the influence of haters on social media.

In this regard more attention and more initiatives are needed in all the OSCE member States.

Prevention and **Intervention** are the two basic ways to cope with this phenomenon, and they work in tandem.

In fact while Intervention to deal with an actual case of violation of the prohibition of discrimination and hatred is certainly necessary to protect the victims and to prosecute the perpetrators, likewise Prevention is necessary both to educate the youth to respect all groups and individuals regardless of their faith or belief, ethnic background, sexual orientation, political views etcetera, and also to avoid the negative and harmful actions of organisations whose main aim is to attack minority religions, yoga practitioners and members of alternative spiritualities or life-paths.

Freedom of Speech is a fundamental liberty and as such, just like Freedom of Religion or Belief and other fundamental freedoms, is protected by the main International Human Rights Instruments.

Freedom of Speech is incompatible with hatred, and propagating and disseminating fake news damaging others for the sake of intentionally hurting them is not protected by any human rights provisions.

Hate speech is in fact the opposite and the contrary of the necessary True and Genuine Dialogue of individuals and groups based on mutual knowledge and mutual respect.

In line with the intentions, the aims and the spirit of the International cooperation, mutual understanding can be fostered in several ways.

We appreciate the initiative of some OSCE Members States, and of some other non-OSCE States, to appoint Ambassadors for Freedom of Religion and Belief, that in some cases are Ambassadors for FORB and lifestyles.



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As wished by Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, we also wish, hope and recommend that other OSCE member States, following the successful examples of the United States of America, and of other States, may appoint such expert Ambassadors to spread knowledge and understanding and to keep alive peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths and of no faith, fostering peace and respect for all.

In line with the need to prevent and stop hatred and undue attacks against minority groups and their members, we hope and recommend that more OSCE participating States look into initiatives, including also appropriate legislation, to tackle the serious problem of hate speech on the Internet and on social media; this may also include, but it's in no way limited to, monitoring the activities of dubious groups that, often claiming to assist victims of what they call dangerous cults or even hiding behind the banner of groups for the information on Satanism and other cults, in fact operate mass disinformation campaigns claiming, for instance, that several millions of people are being manipulated by gurus that supposedly brainwash them, sexually abuse them and extort money from them against their will.

Most of these campaigns are based on fake news, and the figures and other data used for these campaigns are totally made up by the groups originating these campaigns and not supported by any independent agency.

In conclusion, the intentionally and deliberately created fake news damages the targets of the specific hatred campaign, be it the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, the Hindus, the non-believers, or the followers of older or newer religions, spiritualities or life-paths, and as such fake news cannot be tolerated nor protected arguing on the right to freedom of speech or other liberties either.

Hate and human rights are the opposite and contrary of each other.

Those few States that still support, either financially or in other ways, groups that create fake news and generate hatred campaigns causing social panic should stop doing so and instead should start implementing the international legislation and in this line also take all the necessary steps to eradicate prejudice, discrimination and mistreatment of minority groups and their members.

Humanity, Justice and Peace for All shall prevail and we will keep working towards that direction.

Thank you for your attention.

Alessandro Amicarelli
Chairman and spokesman on behalf of
European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)