



## Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe

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Palace of Congresses

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### Panel Session: Hate Speech laws and anti-discrimination no marginalize believers

The Observatory monitors and catalogues instances in which Christians and Christianity are marginalized or discriminated against throughout Europe. Currently we feature over 700 individual cases.

The Observatory gathers instances of discrimination against Christians from media sources and individuals who report to us. It briefs international governmental organizations, such as the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). All findings are available to politicians, NGOs, journalists and interested individuals through our website.

**Social intolerance** varies from vandalism, to personal insults and attacks, to insensitivities in arts, removal attempts of religious symbols and exclusion of Christians or Christian ideas.

For example: „84% of the vandalism in France in 2010 was directed against Christian sites.“ (French Ministre de l'intérieur, 3/11/2010), „48% of all clergy had suffered from some form of violence in the past 12 months in the UK in 2006.“ (CLERGYsafe Survey March 2006, National Church Watch)

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 (ComRes, UK, 2011).



**With regard to discrimination**, we have documented several areas of laws in Europe, which cause legal limitations for Christians. The following areas are the most striking:

## **FREEDOM of CONSCIENCE**

Civil servants who do not want to perform gay wedding ceremonies and conscientious objection in relation to abortion or abortifacients. Problems are encountered by doctors, nurses, midwives, students for the medical professions or faithbased hospitals as well as pharmacists, with regard to their own involvement or an obligation to refer to someone else.

## **FREEDOM of EXPRESSION**

Overboarding hate speech legislation has caused difficulties for preachers, clergy, street evangelists, politicians and intellectuals when speaking in public on specific Christian concepts.

## **PARENTS' RIGHTS**

Parents' rights are at stake when homeschooling is forbidden, or made extremely difficult. They are at stake when the contents of sexual education or the legal parameters of religious education contradict violently the parents' ethos.

## **FREEDOM of RELIGION**

The institutional dimension of freedom of religion is violated when anti-discrimination legislation becomes discriminatory for example with regard to hiring staff, renting out Church property, etc.

## **PRIVATE AUTONOMY**

We also often note that **discriminatory equality policies** - overboarding non-discrimination legislation – violates private autonomy. This is especially the case, when non-discrimination legislation is extended to the private sector, the provision of goods and services.

We are very happy that the **Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE** has taken up the issue recently in a unanimously adopted resolution in July 2011:

The parliamentary assembly recommends 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"; that "in view of discrimination and intolerance against Christians, 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", and "encourages the media not to spread prejudices against Christians and to combat negative stereotyping".

### **Interestingly, we often encounter difficulties from the same three groups:**

**Feminism advocating reproductive rights:** Their goal is factual equality of men and women; provision of abortion and contraception without conscientious objection; pre-implantation diagnostics; sex without ties; sex education with the aim of: It's ok when it feels good.

**Genderists advocating LGBT rights:** Their goal is to get rid of all biological ties. They want to achieve gay marriage with full legal and societal recognition, including adoption; and they are not happy with Church employer ethos rights.

**Secularists advocating atheism rights:** Their goal is to exclude religious viewpoints from public life; to remove religious clothing and symbols from the public and to stop public funding of religion.

Logically, where faiths, religion, churches get in their way, they become a target, and Christian cannot agree to many of their claims. They often do not hesitate to employ intolerant means in their work and to advocate for laws which discriminate against believers.

It is a major aspect of the work of the Observatory to advocate equal rights for all, including Christians, by raising awareness of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe. It is important that the major human rights institutions are aware of the problems and ready to tackle them. Politicians, intellectuals and civil society are very much invited to take these problems up in their work.

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