

THE EUROPEAN HUMANIST FEDERATION

Statement at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on 1 October 2012

By Hans Christian Cars on behalf of the European Humanist Federation

Humanism is a non-religious life stance, but we don't say we know there is no god. We just don't believe there is one, as we find this to be extremely unlikely, but we do have some other strong beliefs. We believe in democracy, human rights, the rule-of-law, secularism and last but not least in the freedom expression.

A limit to the freedom of expression must not be set where a speech or a text is considered provocative, a song insulting, a painting not artistic enough or showing the wrong motive or a drawing not respectful enough.

In our view, the only acceptable limit to the freedom of expression is when it is used to incite hatred aiming at physical violence against a person or group of persons. This is and should be illegal, but it is even more serious, when people actually resort to physical violence, either as a means to defend their religion or to frighten others from expressing their critical opinions.

One of the most difficult obstacles and threats to the freedom of expression is when Governments and religious leaders are more interested in safeguarding religion from criticism than to protect the freedom of expression and when laws against blasphemy restrict this freedom. The most recent events emanating from a stupid and offensive film displayed on YouTube have unfortunately led to an increase in demands for such legislation, not to mention numerous incidents of outrageous and murderous violence.

Thus, we are strongly opposed to the Turkish prime minister's recent call for international regulations against blasphemy, as we don't think there is a need for such regulations.

We are seriously concerned at what happens when Governments seek to protect religion from criticism. We are, for instance, appalled by the most intolerant treatment and imprisonment of Pussy Riots in Russia. Another example; as late as a week ago a young facebook user was arrested in Greece for having made jokes about an orthodox monk. Is this the kind of cultural climate we wish to see in a free society? - In our view, certainly not!

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe reported four years ago, that it was neither necessary nor desirable to treat an insult to religious feelings as a criminal offence, unless it has an element of incitement to hatred as an essential component.

We agree with the Commission and call upon all around this table to defend the democratic achievements attained since the time of enlightenment and help us avoid a reactionary setback that would undoubtedly restrict our hard won freedom of expression.