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EUROPEAN UNION: OSCE Review Conference

EU Statement – Session 2: Fundamental Freedoms I (1)

Warsaw, 1 October 2010

Dear Mrs. / Mr. Moderator

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Dutch Representation - HRWF (07.10.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Since the Vienna Review Conference in 1999, many OSCE participating States have made great strides in implementing their commitment to protect the Freedom of Religion or Belief. As this right is at the core of the foundation of the EU, all EU member States are unequivocally devoted to continue promoting and protecting the Freedom of Religion or Belief. Implementation of OSCE commitments in this field, as well as eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief remain a key priority for the EU.

The EU commends the advances made in protecting the Freedom of Religion or Belief since the 1999 Review Conference. Even though OSCE participating States have made important steps since 1999, violations of the Freedom of Religion or Belief and the associated right of individuals to freely practice their faith continue to be violated in countries in the OSCE area.

One of the most persistent problems in some OSCE participating states is the curtailment of the freedoms of religion or belief in light of security concerns. Though these concerns in themselves are often legitimate and countering extremism continues to be a challenge for all countries within the OSCE area, the EU recalls that restrictions on the Freedom of Religion or Belief – as on any fundamental human right – must be narrowly defined and extremely limited, in accordance with article 9 of the ECHR and articles 4 and 18 of the ICCPR, which all clearly outline the very specific cases of restriction of the freedom of religion or belief. Article 4 of the ICCPR excludes specifically the Freedom of Religion or Belief from the exceptional decisions that can be adopted in case of public emergency. The EU recalls the commitment of OSCE participating states in the Charter for European security “that respect for

human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security"

A further challenge regarding the Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE area remains the protection of the basic human right to manifest one's religion or belief. That is why the EU reiterates that the freedom to express one's religion or belief is an integral part of this freedom, and that the Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Freedom of Expression are indeed complementary and not competing rights. Respecting the Freedom of Religion or Belief means allowing for individuals to express their views on religion or belief, while at the same time leaving ample opportunity for criticism and questioning of one another's values.

The EU strongly rejects any hierarchy among religions and beliefs. We regret that despite many OSCE participating States having asked attention for this ongoing problem, since the Vienna Review Conference, there has unfortunately been limited progress made by certain States to guarantee the Freedom of Religion or Belief for specific communities of faith or belief, especially with regard to minority, non-traditional religions. The EU is concerned that authorities in some participating States continue to control and exert pressure on such communities, particularly by registration procedures that often seem to be introduced and implemented with the goal of controlling religious groups. Some States even go so far as to work against religious groups seeking to achieve a status of registration, and repress any religious activity that has not been registered. Civil society organizations seeking equal rights for all religious groups are not always heard and sometimes even obstructed in some participating States.

By doing so, these States do not act in line with the Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Freedom of Religion or Belief. No limits can be put on the number of adherents of a religion or whether a religion has traditionally been observed in a certain country or region or not. The EU further deplores that some participating States do not take enough responsibility to protect those who are particularly vulnerable as regards their religion or belief, and calls on those States to provide them adequate protection. States must also prosecute and try those responsible for attacks on places of worship, and abstain from arbitrary detention for reasons of religion or belief.

The EU would like to recall the excellent results achieved by the successful Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2009. The EU is looking forward to the upcoming SHDM due in December 2010. Though this meeting is scheduled after this Review Conference, the EU encourages the recommendations of both States and civil society gathered at this SHDM to be taken into account in the work of the OSCE on further implementation of the Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Notwithstanding the remaining challenges in this field, the EU commends the advances made in protecting the Freedom of Religion or Belief since the 1999 Review Conference. The close cooperation of the OSCE with other international organisations has been essential in the advances made in protecting the Freedom of Religion and Belief. The joint work on legislative review of the OSCE's Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has been particularly fruitful. The EU would also like to express its warm appreciation of the cooperation with the ODIHR and its Panel of Experts on Freedom

of Religion or Belief, as well as with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In conclusion, the EU reiterates the continued need to fully implement the Vienna Concluding Document's commitment that all participating States "will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." The EU will continue to take action in support of implementing this commitment in the OSCE area.

Thank you for your attention. The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilization and Association Process.

**Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area

Two political parties say army imams go too far

Reformatorisch Dagbad (09.04.2010) / HRWF (14.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - PVV (Freedom Party) and Trots op Nederland (Proud about The Netherlands) think that the recently appointed Muslim chaplains are going too far. They made this statement after the newspaper De Telegraaf said on 9 April that the army had been hastily accommodating various Islamic practices since the appointment of imams Ali Eddaoudi and Suat Aydin.

The imams are said to teach the army cooks how to cook halal. They also try to get partial exemption from military exercises during the fasting period of ramadan.

PVV Fritsma wants secretary of state De Vries (National Defense) to put an end to "the islamization of the army". Verdonck (Trots op Nederland) thinks that the army should be religiously neutral.

A Moroccan mosque smeared

HRWF (31.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Moroccan Nasser mosque in Veenendaal was smeared with a While Power slogan in the night 28-29 March. A stone was also thrown through a small window. A first similar incident had already occurred two weeks ago in another mosque: same slogan and same colour. Two pig feet had then been put in front of the door.

A complaint has been lodged by the mosque and local Muslims intend to patro the area to avoid further damage.

Dutch anti-Islam politician creates stir in UK

By RAPHAEL G. SATTER and ARTHUR MAX

AP (05.03.2010) / HRWF (20.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Dutch anti-Islam maverick Geert Wilders took his cinematic assault on the Quran to Britain's House of Lords on Friday, sparking heated debate inside the building and angry protests outside.

The invitation to Parliament, and Wilders' stunning political gains in the Netherlands this week, highlight a growing dichotomy in Europe: concern at the increasing number of Muslims who reject long-cherished liberal values, against the liberal tradition of welcoming the world's unfortunates and embracing multiculturalism.

Wilders screened his 15-minute film "Fitna" to about 60 people, including a half-dozen peers, in a wood-paneled committee room in Parliament. The film associates the Quran with terrorism, homophobia and repression of women.

Outside, about 200 protesters jeered and chanted "Fascist thugs off our streets." Police scuffled with several demonstrators who tried to block a street to prevent a demonstration of pro-Wilders activists from the English Defense League from approaching Parliament.

The bleach-blond politician later held court for the British media, replete with quotes from Thomas Jefferson, George Orwell and references to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"I believe Islam is a violent and dangerous religion — but I have nothing against Muslims," he told reporters. Nevertheless, he said he wanted a Europe-wide ban on Muslim immigrants because "I believe they bring along a fascist ideology."

The visit, and the controversy surrounding it, added to Wilders' visibility as he heads into a national election campaign with his popularity soaring and polls predicting that his come-from-nowhere Freedom Party will be among the two largest in the next Dutch parliament.

His party scored well in local elections this week, winning one city outright and placing second in another. But his 4-year-old party lacks a national organization, and it declined to field candidates in nearly 400 other town hall races.

Wilders said he might even become prime minister after the June 9 election, although Dutch political analysts say it is unlikely he could garner a majority coalition if his party emerged as the largest.

The 46-year-old lawmaker said that if he came to power he would create a Dutch equivalent to the First Amendment — as well as closing all Muslim schools, forbidding the construction of any new mosque and banning the Quran, which he described as more dangerous than Hitler's manifesto Mein Kampf. The Prophet Muhammad, he said, "was a barbarian and a pedophile."

The intemperate language — heard in Britain only on obscure reaches of the extreme right — made even his hosts uncomfortable.

"I don't necessarily believe that," said Lord Pearson, the leader of Britain's U.K. Independence Party, a fringe group defined principally by its opposition to the European Union.

Wilders describes himself as a libertarian and rejects comparisons with right-wing European politicians such as Jorg Haider in Austria and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France. His special blend of traditional Dutch tolerance and anti-Islamic rhetoric defies easy categorization, and others throughout Europe have taken note of his success.

The English Defense League — a newly formed, self-described "counter-jihad" movement with reported links to the U.K. far-right — has mimicked Wilders's relentless focus on Islam.

France's immigration minister in November launched a series of "national identity debates" that stirred up anti-immigrant, and sometimes anti-Islam, sentiment that alarmed some in the mainstream. France's conservative government is also moving toward banning face-covering Islamic veils.

In Denmark, discontent about immigration fueled the rise of the nationalist Danish People's Party, whose leaders regularly bash Islam and urge Muslim immigrants to adopt Danish values and culture. The party won 25 of 175 seats in Parliament in the last election in 2007, making it Denmark's third biggest political party. It has used its leverage with the center-right minority government to push through sharp restrictions on immigration.

Outside the British Parliament, protesters calling themselves antifascists denounced Wilders and his backers of the English League as racists.

Jack Kavanagh, one of the people wrestled out of the crowd by police, expressed scorn for Wilders, calling his movie "racist tripe."

Across the way, 70-year-old retiree Ian Birchall said the English League was composed of "a particularly unpleasant bunch of racists" intent on setting Britons against the country's approximately 2 million strong Muslim community.

Back in the Netherlands, Wilders' outspoken attacks on Islam have brought charges against him for "hate speech," a little-enforced crime subject to a maximum one-year jail sentence and fine. He appealed to have the case dismissed, saying his remarks were not against Muslims but rather against Islam, and were protected by freedom of speech. Last month the court ruled against the objection, but is yet to set a trial date.

He has been under permanent police protection since his life was threatened in 2004 by the Muslim radical who killed filmmaker Theo van Gogh. His name was in a note pegged with a knife to van Gogh's lifeless chest.

Max reported from Amsterdam. Associated Press Writers Angela Charlton in Paris and Karl Ritter in Stockholm contributed to this report.

Anti-Islam leader does well in Dutch vote

The popularity of Geert Wilders, known for his repeated public statements attacking Muslims, has dented the image of the Netherlands as a country that has often portrayed itself as a bastion of tolerance

March 04, 2010

RFE/RL (04.03.2010) / HRWF (20.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Early returns in Dutch municipal elections showed the party known for its tough stances on immigration and Islam making big gains in a result seen as a possible foreshadowing of upcoming national elections.

Preliminary results showed that the Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders came first in Almere, east of the capital, Amsterdam, and second in The Hague behind the Labor Party (PvdA).

Speaking to supporters today, Wilders said, "What is possible in The Hague and Almere is possible all over the country." He added that, in the national vote, "we will become the biggest party in the Netherlands."

Full results won't be certified until March 5.

Political gridlock

Wilders' party, set up in 2006 to "stop the Islamization of the Netherlands," contested only those two cities in its first municipal election on March 3, three months ahead of early general elections on June 9.

The center-left national government collapsed last month, when the PvdA withdrew from the ruling coalition in a spat with the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) over extending the Dutch military mission in Afghanistan.

Outgoing Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende has said the 1,600 Dutch troops serving with the NATO-led force in the province of Oruzgan were now likely to withdraw in August as planned.

The PvdA appeared to have benefited from its stance over Afghanistan. Its leader, former Deputy Prime Minister Wouter Bos, told supporters, "We were declared dead and buried, but with our struggle, humility and ideals we have come back."

"The Labor Party today is without any doubt the leading progressive party in the Netherlands," Bos added. "It gives us hope and confidence for June 9."

An opinion poll showed that the PVV would win the most seats -- 27 in the 150-member Dutch parliament -- in the June 9 election. But most left-leaning parties have already said they would not work with Wilders.

Political observers say that, with the country's two main parties, the CDA and PvdA, at odds, and other parties split equally between left and right, it may prove very difficult for either side to build a workable coalition.

Wilders' party came in second in the European elections of June 2009 with 16.7 percent of the vote behind the CDA.

Enemy of Islam

The popularity of Wilders, known for his repeated public statements attacking Muslims, has dented the image of the Netherlands as a country that has often portrayed itself as a bastion of tolerance.

Muslims make up about 6 percent of the population, and Wilders says their presence threatens the Dutch way of life.

Wilders' 17-minute film stigmatizing Islam, "Fitna," received worldwide attention in 2008 when its release on the Internet sparked condemnation by authorities in Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan.

The film, whose title means "strife" in Arabic, juxtaposes verses from the Koran with images of beheadings, attacks by Islamic terrorists, and clerics calling for jihad.

A year ago Wilders was turned back at London's Heathrow Airport because, authorities feared his visit would incite violence. He was allowed into Britain several months later after a court overturned the ban.

Wilders is awaiting trial in the Netherlands for allegedly inciting racial hatred with remarks that include equating the Koran and Islam with the ideology of Nazism and Adolf Hitler's book "Mein Kampf." Wilders has claimed he was the victim of "an attack on freedom of expression."

Protests about the construction of a mosque in Arnhem

HRWF (20.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The inhabitants of Arnhem are divided about the construction of a Turkish mosque in the Klarendal district. The project supported by the Islamic Union foresees a 25-meter minaret.

In the municipal council, the Socialist Party is opposed to the project because the Islamic Union is connected to Milli Görüs. The majority party (PvDA) has 13 seats out of 39 in the municipal council but is divided on the issue.

The local residents are not against a mosque accommodating 250 believers but they fear that with the passing time it will attract 500 people or more.

For the moment, the local Muslims meet in a shop.
