

**Oral statement on Profanation of Christian Symbols**

**Enhancing Efforts to Prevent and Combat Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Focusing on Hate crimes, Exclusion, Marginalization and Denial of Rights**

**Vienna, May 18, 2015**

Mr. Chair,

The *European Centre for Law and Justice* (ECLJ) would like to draw attention to a growing phenomenon of active disrespect and hatred against Christians and the fight against Christianity. In Europe, not only churches and cemeteries are objects of profanation, but also Christian symbols, such as representations of God and saints, and religious objects and clothes. They are used in the production of “artistic” works (advertising material, various exhibitions, posters, theatre plays and movies), not to serve their religious purpose, to uplift the souls with their beauty or to contribute to a debate, but to insult, offend and mock Christians and their religion, and after all, to tread on the values that founded our free society and our civilization. In 2014, in France, 49 cases of abuse of Christian symbols were reported: 10 were made by the media, 14 by private and advertising companies, 15 by public institutions and 10 by artists[[1]](#footnote-1). Similar expressions were noted in Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Germany[[2]](#footnote-2). Those cases are “*hate speech*”, covered up under an artistic or creative pretext.

Artistic expression enjoys and should continue to enjoy freedom of expression. Nevertheless, this right is not absolute and proportional limitations can be imposed in order to protect the rights of others. To this end, the ECHR defined the state duties: to remain neutral and impartial towards religions and beliefs, but also to ensure protection against gratuitous offence and incitement to violence and hatred against a religious community: “*an obligation to avoid as far as possible expressions that are gratuitously offensive to others (…) and which therefore do not contribute to any form of public debate capable of furthering progress in human affairs”*[[3]](#footnote-3).

The history has demonstrated that repeated propagation of disrespect for a religion is the starting place for future violence against the religious community. Therefore, the ECLJ recommends to the participating States to monitor carefully the growing phenomenon of intolerance against Christians and take appropriate measures in response; and to follow up its Parliamentary Assembly resolution of July 2011, “*encourag[ing] the media not to spread prejudices against Christians and to combat negative stereotyping*”.

The ECLJ also calls the OSCE/ODIHR and international governmental human rights institutions to report on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and recommend appropriate action to their member states and to encourage governments to monitor the situation of Christians carefully and to collect segregated data on hate incidents and crimes against Christians. Finally, ECLJ encourages journalists and artists not to oppose or ridicule Christians and Christianity, but to defend Christian principles which founded our free society and which often clash with today’s convictions of the masses.

1. L’Observatoire de la christianophobie, « *Rapport 2015 sur la christianophobie en France »* ; [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. L’Observatoire de la christianophobie, Profanation des symboles chrétiens; Observatory of Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe ; [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Otto-Preminger- Institut v. Austria*, n° 13470/87, judgment of 20 September 1994 ; [↑](#footnote-ref-3)