

Combatting anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred is of “existential importance” to Europe

Posted: Sat, 17 Oct 2015

First Vice-President Frans Timmermans of the European Commission has said that tackling anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic violence is critical to Europe's future.

In a statement released to record the work of the first Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights, which NSS executive director Keith Porteous Wood attended along with local, national and EU policy makers and experts in a range of fields, First Vice-President Timmermans said that combatting religious hatred was of "existential importance to the future of Europe".

The Colloquium was held to examine underlying reasons behind "the surge in antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents in Europe" and to promote a "culture of inclusive tolerance and respect in the European Union."

At the meeting the National Secular Society stressed the importance of an integrated education system without religious barriers. The NSS argued that separating children by their parents' faith was a wasted opportunity to help tackle religious hatred and sectarianism.

The NSS also discussed the need for schools to actively promote citizenship and appreciation for human rights. The [statement](#) released by the European Commission after the meeting acknowledged the "crucial role of education in preventing discrimination" and recognised that participants had "highlighted that schools offer a unique opportunity to transmit the values of tolerance and respect, since they reach out to all children from an early age."

The Commission called on Member States to foster inclusive education and mutual understanding amongst children and young people through initiatives promoting European values, citizenship education and religious literacy.

"Given this, the prospect of even more faith schools in the UK is a deeply regressive policy," commented NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans. "We need to break down barriers between communities, not have children begin their lives in schools segregated by religious identity."

The Commission said that the meeting considered how "the inflow of a large number of persons from diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions, many of whom are Muslims, added a new element of urgency to efforts to ensure tolerance and respect in European societies."

In order to address rising religiously-motivated violence, First Vice-President Timmermans announced that the European Commission would nominate two coordinators, "one for antisemitism and one for Islamophobia, to help ensure coordination of European efforts on antisemitic and anti-Muslim hatred".

It also called on "local, national, European and international authorities, together with civil society, to support community leaders in the breaking of stereotypes and the developing of counter-

narratives reaching out beyond their own communities".

While the National Secular Society has criticised the use of the term 'Islamophobia' in official language, it welcomes efforts to tackle both anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic violence.

The NSS has previously called for better monitoring and higher quality data to record information about hate crimes, and the European Commission acknowledged that "the better recording of incidents and the underreporting by victims were also seen as central."

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