

Foreword

In recent years, democratic management of religious diversity has become a recurring topic in human rights debate in developed societies. As opposed to the discourse and prophecies now in decline that once predicted the gradual (and permanent) disappearance of the religious factor as a publicly relevant topic, today we are facing contexts in which the religious element acquires an undeniably leading role in social and political debates. Religions, as well as deep moral or spiritual convictions in their most varied forms and manifestations, are no longer the object of a fundamental human right. These have become identifying elements that determine interpretation of the rest of the rights, as well as the use that should be given to different public spaces.

Not all citizens experience the religious fact or live it as intensely or in the same manner. However, several of the most heated debates that affect how public space in society is designed are related to the manner in which differentiated religious facts are dealt with and these often cannot be separated from deeper cultural differences. We need only recall the debate still recurring at present concerning the ban on clothing theoretically based on religious affiliations or the conflicts arising from requests to open places of worship which are different from the history of the country concerned. Other cases in point are the differences of opinion about including religion in the school system, as we are reminded by the recent controversial ruling from the European Court of Human Rights in *Lautsi vs Italy*.

For all of these reasons, the debate on the relationship between the inevitable increase of religious diversity and a

society based on human rights is not only a recurring theme but also relevant. In some of our societies, religious pluralism was thought to be alien to us or limited to certain clearly identified sectors. Traditional debate in this field was based on the dichotomy between religious or confessional views and irreligious and even antireligious views. However, at present, there is no stopping social pluralisation, and its influence and expression is shown to a great extent in the beliefs and spiritual practices of citizens and the groups that make them up. “Nationalised” application of human rights in each country thus faces a relatively recent challenge, at least in the sense of its public expression. This can basically be defined as the need to manage some universal rights through practice that is both varied and respectful with the different identities that live together in society. There is no doubt that recent social processes such as secularisation or the population flows towards Europe have helped to make these debates more important while not being the sole cause that triggered them. It is no surprise that these extremely sensitive subjects sometimes lead to heated debate or that the solutions proposed seem drastic, often seen as more typical of the past than of the inclusive open ideas of democracies. However, this does mean that debate and reflection are unnecessary. Quite the opposite, public institutions in particular and society in general need new guidelines and discourse that will enable them to focus coexistence on pluralism, which is also applicable to religion. This should be interpreted from the perspective of inclusion and pluralism through the constant and imperfect practice of reciprocal accommodation and permanent dialogue. Par-

participation of the different groups involved is essential in this process.

For some time now, the Human Rights Institute at the University of Deusto has centred part of its research and dissemination activities on this debate. In the last several years, different research projects, as well as publications, seminars or lectures have examined rights within a democratic framework of managing religious diversity. The preferential approach has been from minority religious communities. Two recent initiatives have especially contributed to this special issue of the Yearbook of Humanitarian Action and Human Rights. In February 2011, the Institute held an international seminar titled: *Religious diversity and public policies. Implications of Religious Diversity for Public Policies from a Human Rights Perspective. Accommodation of rights at the subnational level*, with the support of MISCOE (*International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe*) and the Basque Government Directorate on Human Rights. The seminar was part of the research project "Religious diversity in the Basque Country. New social and cultural challenges for public policies", financed by the Department of Education, Universities and Research of the Basque Government, and the project: Consolider-Ingenio 2010 "Huri-Age, The Time of Rights", financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation. The Institute organised a second international seminar in September 2011, which was held in Warsaw, Poland and was titled: *Religious diversity*:

Accommodation for Social Cohesion, within the framework of the 8th Annual IMISCOE Conference. This special issue includes the main contributions presented at both seminars and opens up a new space for reflection and contrast of different yet complementary experiences. The essence of the pluridisciplinary commitment of this Human Rights Institute and the research it carries out are captured in the variety of scientific methods and approaches included in this special issue. A great many of the contributions are intertwined with legal analyses which complement each other. These are added to reflections and other empirical research results that mainly come from the field of Social and Political Sciences. The overall result is a new scientific contribution to the subject which looks to share some of the completed works in English and to open up the path for new interdisciplinary research proposals and projects. The topics or problems examined potentially go beyond the narrow boundaries of States and should be tackled from a European

perspective at least. Emphasis should be placed on searching for new interpretations of rights that enable us to achieve greater integration on the continent and coordinate shared spaces within a context of increasing permanent pluralism, which must necessarily be religious as well.

Derechos de autor (Copyright)

Los derechos de autor de esta publicación pertenecen a la editorial Universidad de Deusto. El acceso al contenido digital de cualquier número del Anuario de Acción Humanitaria y Derechos Humanos (en adelante Anuario) es gratuito inmediatamente después de su publicación. Los trabajos podrán descargarse, copiar y difundir, sin fines comerciales y según lo previsto por la ley. Así mismo, los trabajos editados en el Anuario pueden ser publicados con posterioridad en otros medios o revistas, siempre que el autor indique con claridad y en la primera nota a pie de página que el trabajo se publicó por primera vez en el Anuario, con indicación del número, año, páginas y DOI (si procede). La revista se vende impresa Bajo Demanda.