



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe

The Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination conducted a country visit to France from 19-21 January 2015 – their first joint visit under the 2015 OSCE Chairmanship of Serbia.

"Our joint visit to France was scheduled several months ago and comes shortly after the series of terrorist attacks in Paris," said Alexey Avtonomov, the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Christians and Members of Other Religions. "The roots of terrorism and intolerance, as well as suggestions of what should be done to help the society become more cohesive and tolerant were at the focus of our discussions with French authorities, independent human rights institutions and civil society.

In numerous meetings with French authorities during the visit, including with the Ministries of Justice, of Education, and of the Interior as well as with the Ombudsman and the Inter-ministerial Delegate for Combating Racism and Anti-Semitism, the Personal Representatives noted the authorities' commitment to even more vigorously confront any form of discrimination and intolerance.

"These discussions were open and frank," said Talip Küçükcan, the Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims. "We have observed that the French authorities were very concerned about rising Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and prepared to take any measures necessary to protect religious institutions," he added.

While the immediate response and the clear and unambiguous condemnation of the violent acts was applauded, the Personal Representatives were also pleased to learn that the French authorities envisage further reaching and sustainable projects aimed at combating and preventing intolerance and discrimination in France.

"One cannot escape the feeling that the French Jewish Community is at a turning point," said the Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker. Referring to the terrorist killings in the kosher supermarket in Paris two weeks ago and recalling several violent incidents in the past, Rabbi Baker expressed concern over growing numbers of Jews that might consider emigration. "Authorities therefore need to develop new proposals and to take actions that will reverse the situation," he concluded.

The three Representatives remain convinced that timely joint country visits prove to be mutually enriching in efforts by OSCE participating States to remain united against attempts to create divisions on the basis of religion or ethnicity, as was stated in the recently adopted [OSCE Declaration](#).