

Introduction by Didier Pachoud , President of GEMPPI, and Director in charge of FECRIS' Finance, organizer of the Conference in Marseilles

Hello everybody, welcome to Marseilles!

Thanks to the members of GEMPPI present today for their help in organizing this conference and thank you all for coming from afar, from Russia, the United States (New York and California) and Canada.

In 5 minutes, I'll have to be very concise.

I chose to bring answers to the question I am often asked:

What is FECRIS?

First, for an association like ours, the GEMPPI, member of FECRIS based in Marseilles, one might ask what use is FECRIS in our daily work?

Indeed, how can the European organization FECRIS help families and people who come to us or contact us every day here in Marseilles (1200 calls per year)?

For several years, cultic groups have tended to crumble into a multitude of small therapeutic entities and it has becoming increasingly necessary to be connected to a network of specialists spread across France, Europe and even the wide world, for proximity information that can serve victims precisely because all these movement tend to internationalize. You will recall that FECRIS has among others, correspondents in Australia and Israel...

There is also the fact that the Internet has revolutionized communications. Thus, as I said before, many cultic groups, even tiny ones, working abroad can easily and cheaply thanks to the Internet creep into people's homes without external contact. Our associations can confirm this from experience. So here in Marseilles we face, as you do too, activities at a distance by Canadian, American, Japanese, African, Korean, cultic groups, which are sometimes unknown in our country but notorious in other parts of Europe or the world and which cause serious damage to families here. If you look for information about the internet very often there is no special explanation concerning this. Finally it is by questioning the FECRIS network of associations (Austria, Australia, Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, I shall not quote them all as FECRIS concerns at least 23 countries) we get useful information to help families and individuals victim of cultic excesses in Marseilles (Court cases, sex cases, scams, etc.). This happened to me again recently and an answer came from Austria.

Other FECRIS associations across Europe could tell the same story. In fact, when a person uses a local or national association like the GEMPPI, it relates to an international network. Similarly when a person goes to the FECRIS site, it may transfer the question through the global associations' network.

Another thing I could say about the usefulness of FECRIS: cults and sects and extreme religions have NGO and people of influence in all European and international institutions. They often manage to influence political, economic, and cultural policy makers at all levels. It's like a shadow army of fanatical volunteers, draped in a mantle of religious or humanist respectability, offering charity but acting slyly under different labels voluntarily forgetting to specify their real identity. There are only a chosen few who are still aware of the danger specialized in this field, MIVILUDES in France, supported by CIAOSN1 in Belgium, Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen in Austria. Given that FECRIS is a private organization not dependent of a State, of a religion or political party has fewer constraints in its capacity of expression and therefore more

¹ Centre d'information et d'Avis sur les Organisations Sectaires Nuisibles (www.CIAOSN.be)

freedom to denounce the actions of sectarian and cultic groups in the various international institutions. This is a very difficult work to do because France with its tradition of secularity and vigilance, FECRIS with a somewhat similar approach in its religious neutrality, are exceptions in the concert of nations and it is very difficult to overcome opposition by cults and sects disguised as religions in such a minority context. However, FECRIS has repeatedly been able to hamper cultic efforts. Note that some other European States have implemented appropriate measures to prevent or contain the cultic/sectarian phenomenon, including Germany, Austria, the Russian Federation, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Very special thanks to Danièle Muller, the new President of FECRIS, who for years as our representative in the Council of Europe has carried a difficult diplomatic battle since we are not in a position of strength rather the opposite. I would say that we face a hostile environment in some European institutions, but it is also a tactical exercise that has sometimes achieved results that deserve recognition. I wish to express our gratefulness to our founder, Jacques Richard, our president(s) Jean Nokin,(who is no longer with us), Rosa Maria Pujol, Friedrich Griess, present here today, and last but not least, Tom Sackville.

There is still much to be said but I will stop here.

Just one information related to the cult phenomenon that is currently shaking Europe and since we are in Marseilles, was just created 10 days ago the “Association of victims of radical Islam and anachronistic practices - Turquoise Freedom”.

The aim of this association is to help prevent, train, inform, meet, assist in confidence and promote the cause of legal and natural persons confronted or victims of sectarian or other abuses linked to Islamic radicalism or anachronistic and harmful customary practices. The association is secular, humanistic and politically neutral and forbids itself any direct or indirect promotion of a political party or religion or belief which it addresses rationally. This association has an international vocation and plans next year to seek to rally to FECRIS.

This emphasizes the fact that FECRIS is constantly evolving to meet new needs that arise. May I introduce its President, Khaled Slougui, former journalist and former professor of University in Algeria and teacher of the rules and customs of France to newcomers wishing to settle in this country, especially axed on Secularism. He has devised a training module for preventing religious radicalization of interest to the public and professionals who may be faced with radicalized or potentially radicalized people.