

Rudy Salles, French Parliamentarian,
**Author of the Report on “The Protection of Minors against the excesses of sects” in the
Council of Europe**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would have loved to have participated in your conference, as I had been invited to do by the Vice-President of FECRIS, Danielle Muller-Tulli. Unfortunately, my busy agenda did not allow me to join you in Marseilles.

I did nevertheless wish to give you my testimony, that of a parliamentarian who for 25 years has been speaking out in the fight against cults¹ in the French parliament. In France this subject is dealt with very responsibly. Thus, in all the commissions of enquiry in which I have sat, voting has been unanimous. This is certainly rare enough to be stressed. It highlights the fact that in France the fight against cults is a subject that brings consensus and that it transcends party political considerations.

On the other hand, I could not have imagined the extent to which this same subject could solicit so much controversy in Europe. In my capacity as a member of the Legal Affairs Commission at the Council of Europe, I was appointed to prepare a report on the protection of minors against sects. A subject of this nature should have mobilised both the members concerned with the fight against sects and even more so, those with the protection of children. This was not the case. From the very first auditions, it was apparent that there was a wide difference of interpretation between the member countries of the Council. Certain parliamentarians even expressed reservations on the very principle of the report. Others went as far as denying the existence of sects, preferring to speak of new religions. Others were totally ignorant on the subject.

As our work progressed, the atmosphere became more and more tense. The sects' propaganda was at work, even to bringing accusations against the one reporting. In fact, as a member of MIVILUDES, I was accused of not being impartial. Multi-coloured pamphlets were distributed, to make people believe that freedom of thought was being threatened and that I was a horrible liberty killer. This campaign of defamation bore its fruit, with the result that the report did not raise the requisite majority vote.

This experience leaves a bitter taste because I was motivated, as I have been all these years, by the will to protect personal freedom against all cultic excesses, because we know the devastating effects of this on so many individuals.

Thus there is major work to be done at European level, to bring awareness of the reality of this scourge. This is all the more essential in that Europe is a continent without frontiers, which facilitates the development of certain multinational cultic organisations.

We have lost a battle, but will not give up. There will be other fights in this field and we will be present.

Rudy Salles

¹ *Sect* comes from the Latin word *secta*, which means “school of thought.” It may apply to a religious faith or denomination, or it may refer to splinter group. In contradiction, the word *cult* always carries a negative connotation. Cult lobbies in international organizations have obtained that the word “cult” may not be used.