

Summary of the Conference presentation

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Cultic Abuse, the Approach to the Phenomenon by the Belgian Federal Police

Within the Federal Judicial Police of Brussels, there is a team specialised in the monitoring of harmful cult organizations. It is regularly contacted by colleagues facing persons who have been approached by or "captured" into groupings with cult-like characteristics.

They acknowledge not knowing how to react to this kind of situation and wonder whether, as police officers, it is possible to fight against the criminal actions of these cultic groups. They feel helpless in the face of a phenomenon and a context uncommon to the police community, namely the existence of groupings that live in marginality to society, with their own laws, their own rules and their own modes of operation. These groups often consider that it is their right to ignore the democratic laws of a state of law, arguing that their activities are part of their religious or spiritual practices, hence therefore protected by the fundamental laws on the respect of the human rights.

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is guaranteed by the Convention for the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms (Treaty of Rome, 4/11/1950); yet the latter states in its Article 9§2. that ***“Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”***

It is important to always keep the same policy, namely that where charges are filed against these organisations, it is the duty of the Justice Department to prosecute the defendants whatever the reasons or the context which have led them to commit such offences.