

**Georges Fenech (France)** President of MIVILUDES - Inter-ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Sectarian Aberrations

### **The Necessary Mobilization of the European Union Against Cultic Abuses**

I am very honoured to be with you today as the President of the MIVILUDES<sup>1</sup> - Inter-ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Cultic Abuses. This institution is probably unique in Europe and in the world, except in Belgium, which also has a similar public institution.<sup>2</sup> Since 1995 France has a state instrument to combat the cultic phenomenon that presents dangers for the families and the individuals.

Hence the interest that we get in the European Union, since we are, once again, practically the only ones who tackle these issues in our public institutions. We should not leave to the sole associative networks or to the religions, the responsibility to fight and to conduct a particular vigilance.

This inter-ministerial mission is attached to the Prime Minister; its President is appointed by the President of the Republic. This is to show the importance that France places on this question. I am assisted by fifteen very high-level technical advisors, who come from all the ministries: Ministry of National Education, of Health, of Interior, Justice and Foreign Affairs in particular. In each prefecture in France, we also have a correspondent of MIVILUDES, who typically is the Prefect's Office Director, so as to reflect the inter-ministerial character of the initiative. We also have, in each Court of appeal, a correspondent who is a magistrate and who coordinates the public action. You can see the very important network, weaved on the national territory, of responsible people who work at the front line to denounce abuses of human rights.

I must first recall that our country respects the freedom of belief and all freedoms in general, provided that one does not step on or violate the law, and that one respects the rule of law. You know that France is attached to the principle of secularism. This is not the case of Great Britain, for example, which of course leads to differences in approach to the cult phenomenon. We have been attached, since 1905, to the separation of the Church and the State. But the organisations we are talking about will use this religious freedom as a mask to commit their misdeeds; and when they draw us onto religious issues, it is to try and discredit, to de-legitimize the action of France against cultic abuses. We do not put any judgment on any belief, whichever it may be. We fight against abuses.

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<sup>1</sup> MIVILUDES -- Mission Interministérielle de Vigilance et de Lutte Contre les Dériver Sectaires <http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/>

<sup>2</sup> The 2008 report of MIVILUDES: "Other European countries – Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland – globally apply the same approach to the problem as France, although the details differ. In the same way, in some countries, the combat against cultic/sectarian aberrations is managed by the religions themselves or by independent institutions; public structures or private associations".

Which are these abuses? They are the violations of the physical integrity of the persons, rapes, sexual offences, non-assistance to persons in danger; the healer-gurus; the pseudo-therapists who propose turn-key miracles to cure cancer or AIDS, and who deprive their patients of a chance to recover, patients who become their adepts under mental control and who abandon their chemo-therapeutic treatment, for example. Unfortunately, we have in France numerous trials on such issues of therapeutic abuses. We are also talking about damage to property; how many followers have left their fortune to these organisations. You may tell me: "they do what they want, they are grownups, free to join such organisations". Yes! The cults are not prohibited in France, not more than anywhere else. We are in a state of law. Yet our role, as public authorities, is to prevent, educate and inform, especially young people.

When I was a member of Parliament, I had the privilege of chairing a parliamentary commission on the influence of cults on the minors. We had estimated in France that there were between 60,000 and 80,000 children who were affected by the cultic phenomenon. A recent survey commissioned and conducted in September 2010 by the services of the Prime Minister revealed that 66% of the French citizens consider that the cult abuse is a threat to democracy (2 out of 3!). That 25% of the French (1 person out of 4!) knew at least someone affected by a cult, and that 20% of the French (1 out of 5) knew a person who had been victim of a cultic organization.

You see that this is not a marginal phenomenon, but one that increasingly expands. Yet we should not become paranoid and see cults everywhere. But it is clear that our modern societies experience crises, major crises, be they identity, climatic, endemic or financial crises, or crises of the great religions; this provides a fertile soil for these organizations to infiltrate the social fabric and rally all these people who are in loss of their own marks of reference. We believe that there are in France between 600 and 800 dangerous movements and practices that deserve our vigilance.

France is also the only country, I believe, to possess this law which incriminates and punishes mental manipulation and mental control. Mrs. Catherine Picard is the co-author of this law (she is here and will speak this afternoon). Can we say that there is a French exception? Yes, there is one, to the extent that the State is firmly committed to defend, at the end, a certain idea of democracy and the values which we treasure. And to defend them beyond all political opinions: I always like to recall that the cult question brings together all the French political families. All the texts of law and the "About-Picard" law were voted unanimously in the Parliament: we are clearly at the core of the problem.

Hence I regret that, in Europe, unfortunately, there is not the same level of awareness. Yet it exists, it is sufficient to see all the parliamentary reports, all the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly since 1984, since the first report of Richard Cottrell, followed by the reports of Berger and

Nastase, who recommended that Europe should organize itself, establish some cooperation, a common minimum of action, perhaps the creation of a ‘European Observatory’, perhaps the development of a European programme. Since I became President of MIVILUDES, two years ago, I have taken the ‘pilgrim’s stick’ to tour the European capitals, trying to convince people of the need to develop such a programme. I was received by the European Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna, and we are currently lobbying the European parliamentarians to implement this European cooperation. As Mr Rector Pero Lučin said this morning, with the Internet today, the large organizations reach beyond the borders and one must agree on a minimum, common viewpoint and common action. We must go from intention to action.

This is what I wanted to tell you on behalf of the Inter-ministerial Mission, which I chair. I shall simply conclude, since we are in Croatia, by telling you of my attention being drawn to two phenomena, two events, one which concerns a Moroccan citizen -- all this is recounted in the Croatian press -- a certain Mekki Torabi, who apparently comes to Croatia regularly and attracts thousands of Croats who queue to receive Mr Meki Torrabi’s energy transfer from 5 planets, which will cure all diseases. Now, Mr Mekki Torrabi is free to transfer the energy of the 5 planets; after all, why not!?! Granted to thousands of your fellow citizens that they receive this energy, and upon leaving that they give 50 cents for a small vial of water that has also received this energy! My concern is that Mr Mekki Torabi seems to receive the support of certain public authorities. This may be the danger of abusing the citizens: “if my representative receives the energy, I should also receive it”... This is where is the danger. This is why in France, we have established, at the Ministry of health, a group which studies all these pseudo-scientific, fraudulent methods and warn our fellow citizens.

And finally, the second element which attracted my attention: it is the creation of the "Croatian association for natural, energetic and spiritual medicine" – the “HUPED” – which issues certificates to pseudo-practitioners. Once again, it is granted to anyone that they are free to associate and to diffuse spiritual or cosmic energy! But what concerns me here is that this Association should receive support from the Croatian State, also from the City of Zagreb. We can fear, from both Mr Mekki Torabi and the HUPED, that their ideas spread elsewhere and come to us in France. Hence the necessity for us to bring you our expertise, our experience in this field. And to tell you: be careful before granting your support, your endorsement – this I say to the elected representatives of course -- to this type of methods (which incidentally have the right to exist). But when one gives the endorsement of the State or of a Ministry, one takes in my view a serious risk vis à vis the population.

Ladies and gentlemen, faithful to our ideals in Europe, the old continent of human rights, and respecting, I repeat, the freedoms of belief, I invite you to support here in Croatia, the action of

International Conference  
DESTRUCTIVE GROUPS AND YOUTH  
Friday 26 November 2010 - Rijeka Town Hall – Conference Hall  
Under the patronage of The Primorsko-goranska Region and the City of Rijeka.  
Organizers: The University of Rijeka – Centre for Information on Sects and Cults (CISK) - European Federation of Centres of  
Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS)

FECRIS, an INGO at the Council of Europe and CISK, the Croatian member of FECRIS<sup>3</sup> because the combat that these associations fight is simply the combat for the defence of democracy, of our liberties, families and individuals. Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> CISK - Centre for Information on Sects and Cults – Croatia, Member of FECRIS