

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)

## **Conference opening**

*Miroslav Matešić - Deputy Mayor of the City of Rijeka*

The City of Rijeka is hosting this conference -- a first in Croatia -- to show its awareness of cultic groups. Rijeka recognizes the value of the recommendations of the Council of Europe: it shares the Council's views that the cultic abuses violate human rights, particularly in the areas of health, education and respect of privacy and family life. Many cult-like organizations abuse the freedom of religion as a mask to commit their misdeeds. This threatens the fundamental freedoms and democracy. Today's youth are in the maelstrom of radical social changes which have been affecting Croatia in a period of transition. Their socialization and transition to adulthood take place in rather adverse conditions, in a context of weak or disabled institutions and families. In such a situation, young people often react by joining separate sub-cultural forms of living, displaying open rebellion and/or deviant behaviour. Young people are certainly a group that is most vulnerable in the urban environment. In such environment they face dangers that push the healthy standards of living and the social relations away into the second plan. The authorities are expected to send a clear message to young people about the danger of cultic groups. Therefore, active prevention programs are essential to help young people to choose positive and healthy views of life.