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Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 23 September - 4 October 2013

Working Sessions 6-7: Freedom of religion or belief

P R E S E N T A T I O N

The European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Cultism (FECRIS) honours the right to freedom of conscience and religion and, leaving the theological issues apart, our focus of study concerns the ways different religious and spiritual movements manifest themselves, how they interact with the social environment, how they interact with their followers, what model of social being they suggest, what methods they use during religious practices.

A summary of applied non-democratic methods, means of exploitation, psychological manipulations and informational deception techniques makes the difference between the destructive cult and the system of unusual or non-traditional beliefs which are appropriate and tolerable in a democratic society.

A cult, as a rule, is an autocratic organization which resorts to deceptive recruiting, restricts or manipulates information, imposes and exercises total control over their followers' behavior, thoughts and emotions in order to insure that the members remain obedient to the spiritual leader.

The cult advocates the model which divides the world between good and evil, contradicts the norms of their group behaviour and values to the existing social norms and values, only the spiritual leader holds the truth based on the one minded thinking, the leader holds absolute power, with consequences such as discrimination, abuse, the children and women in particular.

Inside these groups privacy is often monitored, the information is always filtered, phobias and fear is used as a universal instrument to indoctrinate its members and keep them obedient, the ex-members or relatives who do not share the group's religious views are subjects to oblivion and shunning.

This list of anti-democratic methods is far from being complete.

A certain number of the speakers today do comply with all the above stated criteria.

Each year FECRIS participates in the work of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting constantly stressing the necessity of establishing just legislation that will eliminate any possibility of using a religion as a protective shield for any misdeeds.

This year is not an exception. FECRIS calls on the OSCE member states to review and pay close attention to the existing legislation governing the sphere of religion in France and Belgium. These two countries have experienced the scope of existing problems in this field, adopted the corresponding laws, created procedures, gained a valuable experience and practical knowledge which can be applied to other countries to safeguard the human rights and democratic values.