



What are the main issues arising when developing the legislation on freedom of religion or belief?

### Reflections on Legislation on Spirituality

Documenting cases of violations of the freedom of religion or belief in Eastern Europe Soteria International find the main issues arising regarding the development of legislation on freedom of religion or belief to be:

- The contamination from previous existing bad practices in legislating on freedom of religion or belief
- The pressure of distorted and manipulated media and opportunistic political aspects, especially in electoral years.
- The mismanaged judicial cases, covered politically
- Third part interests such as an all dominant religion, or atheistic lobby groups
- The interference of non-spiritual aspects, such as economic interests and a politicized approach of legislating on freedom of religion or belief: *when politics interferes with the spiritual practice of an individual, by conventional and formal reasons, this interference might have severe spiritual consequences that the politician may hesitate to acknowledge, due to his lack of expertise in the spiritual domain.*

All these issues meet in the conclusion that the spiritual sphere of human life must be protected from the interference of other dominant aspects when addressed from a legislative or political angle. Analogically, just as the ecology of the living nature is based on universal principles that are incommensurable with those of economy or politics, the ecology of our souls needs the protection from the very same factors that else dominate the interests of power today.

The paradigm of defining and legislating the freedom of religion or belief has to be revised according to the European present dynamic domain of human conscience and faith. The spiritual praxis of Europe has changed radically the last 40 years. Today we face a situation where it is necessary for the governmental powers to take this into account and work harmoniously with spirituality, instead of seeing it as a threat to the order and harmony of society.

The freedom of conscience is the one touching the innermost sphere of the spirit, thus one can even say that it creates the justification, deeply rooted in each individual, of all other liberties. Therefore, **Soteria International** holds that the freedom of religion and belief are only particularities of a wider range of rights, innate in the conditions of human existence, that we could call spiritual human rights. By referring only to the freedom of religion or belief when it comes to defend the specific human rights, an implicit discrimination is always present. This discrimination is present in the national and European official laws and structures as well as in the civil society.

Spiritual healing, channelling, yoga, meditation, natives' cults and spiritual beliefs could be connected to religious phenomena, but never reduced to the later. They are the universal manifestations of the human striving for perfecting the conditions of human life, as similarly recognised within the fields of nutrition, art and education.

Soteria International invites a broader definition of the emerging field of spiritual human rights, in order to include the pan-religious forms of human conduct which are in need for the same careful human rights approach, as the structured and established religious conducts do.

Implicitly, the religious rights category should be extended into a so called "spiritual human rights" one, for the spiritual realm in human life includes but is not limited to so-called religions and sects.

### Recommendations

Soteria International recommends the protection of the spiritual human rights from other interests by consulting experts in the field to value the spiritual consequences of suggested legislations, thus integrating the spiritual expertise as a part of the solution rather than an apparent problem through alienation.