



European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism
Participant in the Fundamental Rights Platform of the European Union since 2010
NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2009
INGO with participatory status at the Council of Europe since 2005

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 26 September - 7 October 2011**

Working session 1: Fundamental freedoms I, including:

- **Freedom of expression, free media and information;**
- Address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

26 September 2011

Intervention on behalf of the

**European Federation of Centres for Research and Information on Sectarianism
(FECRIS) by Friedrich Griess, previous president**

I represent FECRIS, a federation of more than 50 organisations in about 30 countries in Europe and beyond, having the objective to help people and families who have been damaged psychologically, socially and financially by totalitarian organisations, commonly called cults or sects, and to do preventive work to avoid further damage.

This preventive work is justified by article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights ¹ and article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union ², about the Freedom of Expression and Information.

Such preventive work is often attacked by the claim of totalitarian organisations that they are religions and any negative expression about them should be forbidden because it violates the freedom of religion.

However there are decisions and recommendations by international bodies that state that religions must also tolerate criticism if it is justified and not a hate speech.

Examples:

Recommendation 1805 (2007) ³ on Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion

¹ <http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html>

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2007-0445+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN#title2>

³ <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta07/EREC1805.htm>

Saying, among others, that

1. [...] Freedom of expression is not only applicable to expressions that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive, but also to those that may shock, offend or disturb the state or any sector of population within the limits of Article 10 of the Convention. Any democratic society must permit open debate on matters relating to religion and religious beliefs.[...]
4. [...] In this connection, the Assembly considers that blasphemy, as an insult to a religion, should not be deemed a criminal offence.
5. The Assembly [...] agrees [...] that in a democratic society, religious groups must tolerate, as must other groups, critical public statements and debate about their activities, teachings and beliefs, provided that such criticism does not amount to intentional and gratuitous insults or hate speech and does not constitute incitement to disturb the peace or to violence and discrimination against adherents of a particular religion. [...]

A special remark has to be made about the abuse of copyright. The best way to unveil the intentions and methods of totalitarian organisations is to quote their own publications. If this is done partly in order to comply with the copyright law, they may claim that this was taken out of context. The copyright law, originally designed for another purpose, usually prevents full quotations and thus conflicts with the freedom of expression and information. Obviously we need some further development of laws in this area.