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Session 1

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is obvious to everyone that the concept of "freedom of religion or belief" are generalized. Their interpretation and application in practice can be very different even in a democratic society. *In the US, France, Britain or Italy, they are clearly different. Each of these countries has its own model of the relationship between society and the state with religious organizations. However, they are all recognized as democratic.*

From this it follows that in practice it is important not only to declaratively recognize the importance of the principles of freedom, but first of all is important the practice of interpretation, practical understanding these principles.

*It is generally known that texts and concepts do not exist without their interpretation. Therefore, it is important not only the formal recognition of the right to freedom of religion and belief, but also the concrete filling of this right.*

And here, first of all, it is important how society and the state interprets religion and faith, and how the principle of secularity of the state understands.

In general, we can distinguish three basic models of the relationship:

- 1 Religion is recognized as good. Secularity of the state is treated as a absence of legal, but the presence of the actual influence of religion on the state. At the same time, one or more religious organizations may have special rights, including established by law.
- 2 Religion is recognized as a personal matter. Secularity is treated as a neutral attitude of the state to all religious and non-religious beliefs and their organizations.
- 3 Religion is recognized as a tolerated remnant of the past. Secularity is interpreted as limiting the influence of religion on society.

In practice, you can see different models, but in general it is either the combination of models 1 and 2, or the combination of models 2 and 3, where the accents can shift between them.

In my opinion, in order to find answers to the questions that are discussed at this session, it is important to answer one simple question: religion and faith are useful or harmful to society and the state.

On the one hand, the answer seems obvious, especially from my point of view - religion and faith are good and useful. But on the other hand, both in the past and now we see *a completely opposite trend, namely, an explicit or covert, but real attitude to religion as a "tolerable evil,"* which can not be avoided, but which the state must limit.

*Secularity of the state is treated not as neutrality in relation to **all** kinds of beliefs, but as an irreligious, atheistic or agnostic approach to regulating the role of religion. With this approach, to some extent, non-religious beliefs are initially given priority over religious beliefs. That is, those who believe that there **is no** God, are given the priority right to regulate the condition of those who believe that there **is** God.*

It is obvious that in the past, some religious organizations of the majority have also repeatedly used their privileged position in society and in the state in order to oppress religious minorities, support tyrannical rule, and restrict the rights of those who disagreed with them. The public reaction to this became one of the reasons for the appearance of a negative attitude towards religion and the comprehension of the secular nature of the state as the dominance in it, when so-called "modern" non-religious beliefs over so-called "backward" religious beliefs.

However, now, in my opinion, this, in turn, causes the current crisis, when the atheistic model of secularism is perceived as oppressing religion.

Reaction to this in some cases generates attempts to revive the old models of the particular close interaction of the state with the organization / organizations representing the religious majority (as is the case, for example, in the Russian Federation).

In other cases, this gives rise to radicalization in a religious environment, when the very secular society and the state are perceived as the "enemy", the "devil", with which it is necessary to fight radical, including terrorist methods.

Unfortunately, we see that religious radicalization generates not only a movement towards dialogue and a search for a more balanced modern model of secularism, but often the other way around - a reaction of reinforce the model of atheistic secularism. *The very manifestations of religiosity, for example in wearing visible signs of religious affiliation, are perceived as a danger and are prohibited. What does not solve the problem, but escalates it, drives it underground, radicalizes.*

Therefore, it seems useful to recommend further comprehension and discussion of the problem with the aim of developing a modern, compromise model of the state secularism as neutrality, not only in relation to religions, but also in relation to non-religious beliefs (atheism, agnosticism, etc.), and not the dominance of some over others.

Thank you for attention.