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Working Session 2: Fundamental freedoms I

**FECRIS: A Source of Religious Discrimination in the OSCE in
Contravention of the Right to Religious Freedom under the
Helsinki Accords**

The European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS) FECRIS portrays itself as a collection of national groups protecting the family, the individual and democratic society and representing associations concerned with "sectarian" characteristics. In reality, this group fosters and fuels discrimination and intolerance directed at minority religious organizations and their members in the OSCE region through the dissemination of false and misleading information about these groups and through actions which interfere with the right of minority members to freedom of religion, freedom of association and freedom from discrimination. These actions violate the principles of non-discrimination and minority religious tolerance at the heart of the Helsinki Accords, the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Bill of Rights.

FECRIS and its member groups have been instrumental in fostering and fueling animus towards targeted minority faiths throughout Europe. Some individuals associated with such groups have, in the past, engaged in extremist activities such as deprogramming – which entails kidnapping and false imprisonment of individuals based on their personal associations and beliefs.

Illegal Actions of FECRIS Member Groups in Violation of Human Rights

Examples of civil condemnations and criminal convictions regarding improper and illegal actions in violation of fundamental Council of Europe human rights principles taken by FECRIS member groups or individuals associated with such groups include the following.

- **Deprogramming.** One of the most reprehensible and illegal activities utilized by certain representatives from FECRIS member groups in the past in violation of fundamental Council principles is

the technique of "deprogramming". In a decision rendered by the European Court of Human Rights in 1999 against Spain regarding false imprisonment and deprogramming, the Human Rights Court determined that the FECRIS member group AIS/Pro Juventud had a "direct and immediate responsibility for ... the applicants ... loss of liberty" (37680/97, *Ribera Blume and others v. Spain*).

- **Deprogramming.** Cyril Vosper, at the time an executive board member of FAIR, a FECRIS member group from the United Kingdom, was convicted in December 1987 in Germany for false imprisonment and causing bodily harm in a deprogramming case. He was not expelled from FAIR.
- **Deprogramming.** In 1990, two members of SADK, the FECRIS member group in Switzerland, were sentenced to prison in connection with a violent deprogramming attempt on a member of the Hare Krishna movement. Mr. Rossi, the spokesman for SADK in 1990, spoke out on behalf of SADK in favor of the deprogramming in which the victim had been subdued with tear gas, saying "We support and approve of the deed."
- **Deprogramming.** Members of Swedish FECRIS member group FRI have been convicted in connection with a deprogramming attempt on a member of a Christian group in Gothenburg Sweden.
- **Promotion of "Sect" filters.** The German FECRIS member group AGPF has promoted and disseminated so-called "protection clauses" – clauses inserted into employment contracts that attest that the applicant is not associated with Scientology – to companies in Germany for their use.
- **Defamation.** Mr Friederich Griess is the President of FECRIS and a Board Member of Austrian FECRIS group GSK. On approximately six occasions, Austrian Courts have determined that Mr. Griess defamed Norweger, a Christian religious group present in over 60 countries, by disseminating false and derogatory information to the public regarding this religious group.
- **Defamation.** Courts in France have determined that UNADFI, the French-language FECRIS member group (ADFI founded FECRIS), and individuals and groups associated with UNADFI have engaged in

- **Defamation.** In a final judgement on 19th December 2001 rendered by the Munich State Court (Case Az: 908736/99), Ms. Heide-Marie Cammans, founder of the German FECRIS member group Sect-info Essen, was ordered to stop circulating falsehoods about the religious group Takar Singh. Sect-info Essen was also forbidden from circulating a book it had been distributing about Takar Singh (*Die Neuen Heilsbringer, Auswege oder Wege ins Aus*)

Discrimination Against Minority Faiths

Although FECRIS purports to support religious pluralism, its literature makes clear that it is referring to its own narrow definition of religion which excludes religious groups targeted by FECRIS as “sects”.

This type of classification has resulted in the stigmatizing and blacklisting of religious groups as “sects” in the OSCE region. There is no rational justification for such classification. It is designed to ensure that the principles of equality and non-discrimination are withheld from groups stigmatized as “sects” in contravention of fundamental human rights.

The United Nations, religious experts, and UN treaty-based bodies have consistently found that the expression "religion or belief," as well as the individual terms "religion" and "belief," must be construed broadly to include non-traditional religions and all forms of belief.

Likewise, the Human Rights Committee has found that freedom of religion is not limited in its application to traditional religions and that any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community, contravenes Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in

its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. *The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community.*

General Comment No. 22 on Art. 18 (Para 2).

The discriminatory approach advocated by FECRIS undermines religious freedom for all and represents a breach of Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the objective of the OSCE to achieve unity and harmony throughout Europe by eliminating all forms of discrimination, and ensuring that all citizens have the free right to practice any religion and hold any religious belief.

Conclusion

These examples of discrimination by FECRIS member groups and illegal and reprehensible actions individuals associated with these groups underscore why FECRIS constitutes an international organization that undermines religious freedom and religious tolerance in the OSCE region in contravention of the principles of non-discrimination, equality and religious freedom for all.