

**Branka Dujmić-Delcourt** (Croatia - Belgium), President of CISK Croatia, Member of FECRIS Council of Administration and Delegate of FECRIS to the Working Group on cults at the Council of Europe (The Conference of INGOs)<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

These proceedings named «Destructive groups and youth – Manipulation and Exploitation of Young and Vulnerable People by Destructive Groups: Legislative Action at the European Level» represents a concise works of the International Conference that held at the Town Hall in Rijeka in Croatia, on 26 November, 2010. The event was organized jointly by the University of Rijeka, the European Federation of Centres for Research and Information about Sectarianism (FECRIS)<sup>2</sup> at an initiative of the Centre for Information on Sects and Cults (CISK)<sup>3</sup>, which is also member of FECRIS..

This international Conference was made possible thanks to the financial support of the City of Rijeka, the Primorsko-Goranska County, the University of Rijeka, and the participation and contributions of distinguished speakers from institutions and organizations in various European countries.

With this international event, and for the first time in Croatia, well-informed organizations from Europe and beyond will be able to raise the awareness of the Croatian public at large on the work of the Council of Europe on cult abuses and violations of human rights. Minors are particularly vulnerable to the cult phenomenon. When a child is subjected to cultic influence, fundamental rights may be limited, as its future access to the status of free and informed citizen. They are particularly vulnerable to abuse both physical and psychological.

Our (numerous) speakers are here to tell about many of the complex aspects of the sectarian question: what happened in Western Europe, which problems occurred, what solutions were examined and taken at the national and European levels in order to protect the citizens from the harmful effects of sectarian

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<sup>1</sup> **Council of Europe** - The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations

<sup>2</sup> **FECRIS** – “European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism” was founded in 1994 in Paris as a non-commercial association under French law. It declare itself politically, philosophically and religiously neutral as stated in article 2 of its statutes. FECRIS federates 54 associations in 30 countries in Europe, the USA, Latin America, Israel and Australia concerned with contemporary organisations with sectarian and totalitarian characteristics, whether legally constituted or not, whose practices violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, European and national laws. FECRIS acts as a participant in the Fundamental Rights Platform of the European Union since 2010, NGO special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2009 and as an INGO with participatory status at the Council of Europe since 2005.

<sup>3</sup> **CISK** - “Centre for Information on Sects and Cults” (CISK), is a non-profit organization established in 2007 in Rijeka. CISK was set up with a view to fill a gap in Croatia regarding the information to citizens on the existence, activities, modes of operation and potential dangers of so-called 'alternative' movements, sects, cults, groupings or individuals who, for their own benefit, use methods of manipulation and deceit to take advantage of naïve, credulous people. In the process, these organizations/persons violate human rights and break up individual freedom in many aspects of life, be they related to work, culture, art, ethics, health or finance. Their aim is to make their 'adepts' and families economically, physically, emotionally and spiritually dependent, i.e. incapable of any self-control and decision-making, hence to make them flexible and accommodating to all sorts of manipulations and abuses. CISK is a now a member of FECRIS, the European Federation of Centres for Research and Information about Sectarianism.

groups. Croatian representatives spoke about their knowledge and experiences with the cults in the Croatian society.

This conference did not happen without difficulties. We approached the Human Rights Department of the Croatian Parliament but received no positive response, despite the gratefully acknowledged support of recognized bodies such as FECRIS, CIAOSN<sup>4</sup> or MILIVUDES<sup>5</sup>, and the existence of a Croatian Delegation at the Council of Europe. The conference was therefore not implemented at the Croatian Parliament in Zagreb, as it was intended. On the doorstep of joining the European Union, City of Rijeka, Primorsko-Goranska County and University of Rijeka have opened us doors.

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<sup>4</sup> CIAOSN - Centre d'Information et d'Avis sur les Organisations Sectaires Nuisibles (BE)

<sup>5</sup> MILIVUDES - Mission Interministérielle de Vigilance et de Lutte Contre les Dérives Sectaires (FR)