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COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND MEDIA

Contributions by experts to the work of the Committee on "Freedom of religion and living together in a democratic society"

Contents

1.   Contribution by Grand Rabbi Albert Guigui, Grand Rabbi of Brussels, permanent representative of the Conference of European Rabbis to the European institutions in Brussels

Before getting to the heart of the matter, I would first like to let you know you what the Jewish Community in Europe is feeling at this precise point in time: the Jewish Community is worried and it is afraid. Its members are asking themselves if they still have a future in the Europe to which they have contributed so much[1].

Above all they are afraid for Europe itself, for terrorists are undermining our democratic freedoms. They are attacking our right to freedom of expression by targeting journalists, attacking authority by killing police officers, and targeting minorities, in particular the Jewish community, for either anti-Semitic or doctrinal reasons.

The members of our community are also afraid for another reason. In the past 70 years, this is the first time that people on the streets of European capital cities have been heard to say "The Jews must die!" And we can but ask ourselves "What will happen next?"

Some terrible words are always running through my mind – those spoken in 1930 by Otto Preminger, who said: "The pessimistic Jews left Europe for the United States, the optimists left for Auschwitz". This chilling remark clearly expresses the fear in which some of the members of our community are living today.

Another factor is worrying the members of our community: European countries are increasingly frequently, and democratically, promulgating laws that pose a threat to religious freedoms. For example, some countries have prohibited circumcision or are threatening to do so. For Jews – irrespective of whether they are religious or secular, practising or non-practising Jews – circumcision is one of the pillars of their faith. Kosher slaughter is also being attacked and has been for years. All these measures not only worry Jews but risk making their lives impossible.

Admittedly, Manuel Valls declared that « France without Jews is not France ». Charles Michel, our Prime Minister in Belgium, declared at the Grand Synagogue of Brussels, which is also the Grand Synagogue of Europe, that "anti-Semitism is a matter of national concern". On 20 January 2015, Mr Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, said that "if there is no future for Jews in Europe, there is no future for Europe. Our role is to ensure that each person who lives on the European continent, be they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, Buddhist or anything else, feels that they belong here and that they are safe."

But how are we supposed to live in a country where everything that is most important to us risks being prohibited?

Our schools, our synagogues, and the institutions of our community are barricaded; the police and the army have to protect them. But why? Put yourselves in the place of the parents who take their children to these schools. It is obvious that every morning they have a nagging fear worry that something might happen to their children

This having been said, I would now like to suggest some ideas to help us – the citizens of Europe – to live together in harmony.

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[1] In Europe's history, Jews have often played the role of traders: traders in goods, but also traders in ideas. Their dispersal, their diversity, their cosmopolitanism and their numerous contacts over the centuries made them the first Europeans. They were the first post-modern citizens to share multiple identities, and to lay claim to a common, multi-stranded heritage. They have made a major contribution to the construction of Europe as we now know it. They have been in pioneers in almost every sphere:
In literature: Heine, Proust, and Kafka.
In music: Mendelssohn, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Menuhim.
In physics: Einstein.
In psychology: Freud.
In sociology: Durkheim.
In anthropology: Claude Levy-Strauss.
In arts: Modigliani, Soutine, and Chagall.
And in medicine, law, finance and the economy, and industry, they are too numerous to be mentioned individually.
The Jews' contribution in Europe has been enormous, despite the fact that their numbers are not so large. One writer quite rightly said "The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese population census."

First of all, I think there is a problem of semantics. We use several expressions but not always with their true meaning. There are, for example, two words which we should not confuse: the first is "assimilation" and the second is "integration".

Until recently Europe had a long tradition of assimilating newcomers. In other words those who were different were accepted provided they adapted to ways of the host the country. Those who were different had to change. Jews had to cut their payot, set aside their levite, travel on Jewish holidays, take the oath on the Bible when appearing in court as a witness and even convert.

Today Europe is beginning to understand that because it has allowed people, who are not of the same colour, not Christian, and not so technically advanced, to settle here or even encouraged them to come here, it now has a duty to welcome them, i.e. to take the integration procedure to its logical conclusion. For, contrary to "assimilationists", who also, dare I say, deny the right to 'otherness', integrationists choose to create areas, in particular cultural areas, which help others to live with their brothers and sisters in a humane environment without having to deny that which defines them: their religious practices, the specific language they use to communicate with one another, their dietary customs, etc.

Europe needs to understand that it must no longer talk of "assimilation" but of "integration". We must integrate the minorities who live in our countries, give their members a place and accept them as they are and not as we would like them to be. But in order to do that, we need to promote their religions so that they can all live together in harmony.

Do you know how to produce a jihadist? It's quite simple. You take someone of Muslim belief, born in Belgium or Denmark, for example, who does not know much about his religion and is often a marginal, and an Imam who will take advantage of his ignorance, give him a role to play, and flatter his ego: " You are not useless, not a marginal who knows nothing about anything … You have a role to play, a mission; you can become a *Chahid*; all you have to do is to defend your religion, and be prepared to kill!"

But Islam has never suggested that anyone should kill others and above all not in the name of God. So we need to fight such ignorance; we have to allow each form of worship to develop harmoniously; each religion must have its identity if it is to take root in the country in question. The only way to prevent jihadism is to give each person an identity. We need to build a European Islam.

We often talk about "tolerance". Many of us think of this word as an ideal to strive for, a wonderful word. I personally do not find it wonderful. "*Tolerance" comes from the* verb "*to tolerate*". To tolerate means "to put up with": I don't have any choice in the matter so I put up with it. How condescending can you get! I accept others – fellow citizens or foreigners – because I don't have any choice. I personally, as a citizen, irrespective of whether I am Jewish or Muslim, do not want to be tolerated: I want to be accepted for what I am.

I believe we must stop talking about "tolerance" and talk about our "right to difference". Everyone must be allowed to lead the life they want to live, provided, of course, that they abide by the rules of the country in which they are living. That is what integration means. It means living in accordance with one's beliefs while respecting the rules of the country where you live.

In Europe, people are often afraid of difference. Why is there so much violence in our societies? Because of people's fear of the unknown. When we do not know others, we are afraid; and when we are afraid, we cut ourselves off from others; and when we cut ourselves off from others we lock ourselves up, we become dissatisfied and we can become violent. And violence breeds violence.

On the other hand, as soon as I reach out to others, as soon as I accept others for what they are, then they will also become my "partners". Difference is an asset. Each person contributes the best of his traditions: Italian culture, Moroccan cuisine, Jewish liturgy… And they are all a source of enrichment.

I often say that a painting cannot be a masterpiece if it is of only one colour. What makes a painting beautiful is the harmony of the colours. A society where everyone thinks in the same way, eats the same things and dresses in the same way is ugly. The beauty and wealth of our society lie in its diversity. We must not be afraid of differences, on the contrary.

And as regards the words "living together", I believe that our politicians are making a mistake when they advocate "living together" i.e. alongside one another. I can live alongside my next-door neighbour for forty years without knowing who he is, what he does, and what he thinks but nevertheless I am living alongside him.

We need to exchange the words "living together" for "building together". When people have shared projects and when they work together in tackling a problem, then they discover one another, become partners who help one another find the solution to the problem. Then they no longer fear one another but, on the contrary, grow closer. That is what Emmanuel Levinas calls "the epiphany of the Other", the revelation of the Other.

I believe that if we want to prevent radicalisation, we must have joint projects in which all social classes are involved. The debate we are having here today must be held throughout society. It must in particular be held at the grassroots. We can no longer remain at the level of theory but must put the theory into practice by proposing joint projects that bring people together. It is by building something together that we really get to know and appreciate one another. Unity in diversity should be the message that Europe sends out to its citizens.

2. Contribution by Mr Anouar Kbibech, President of the Gathering of French Muslims (Rassemblement des Musulmans de France – RMF), Vice-president of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman – CFCM)

i. Secularism

Introduction

In the current context, the biggest challenge facing us is how to interpret the concept of secularism. Secularism has been, and must remain, our common good, guaranteeing the freedom to believe or to not believe and the right of all members of society to be different.

The neutrality of secularism is not at risk if "differences" are accepted and also the "right to indifference" i.e. the right to be left to practice one's religion peaceably as long as it does not infringe the country's laws. Secularism is, however, endangered if exclusions or dividing lines are encouraged.

The philosophy underlying the Law of 1905

The Law of 9 December 1905 is first and foremost a law promoting religious freedom. It now serves as the keystone of the legal structure of French secularism. The fact that all sorts of texts, laws and regulations refer to it is sufficient proof of this.

The parliamentary debates that took place prior to the vote on the 1946 constitution, which describes France as a "secular" Republic (the same description is to be found in the 1958 constitution) show that this word was introduced in reference to the law of 1905 on the separation between Church and State.

Further precisions on freedom of religion to be found in other fundamental texts such as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950 were made in conformity with the law of 1905 and the corresponding case-law.

The discussion on the drafting of Article 4 concerning the "organisation" of Churches gave Aristide Briand, the rapporteur on the law, the opportunity to clarify the underlying philosophy and its objectives:
− by describing religious diversity in France as a "fact";
− and by pointing out that it is the primary duty of the lawmakers to refrain from doing anything that would be contrary to respect for such diversity.

In a report to his constituents, Jaurès said that; "The law which the Chamber has approved ensures freedom for all faiths… Freedom of conscience will be fully guaranteed and absolute; the law of separation, thus enacted, is generous, just and wise".

During the debates on the plan to prohibit the wearing of a cassock in public in 1905, Aristide Briand held that it would be contradictory to forbid the wearing of a cassock given that the law of separation had just established "freedom of choice" and that in a secular system , the cassock was "a garment like any other".

Benevolent neutrality and separation

Under Article 1 of the Law of Separation: *"The Republic shall ensure freedom of conscience. It shall guarantee freedom of religious worship, subject to the following restrictions in the interests of public law and order."* The Republic not only guarantees the personal freedom to believe or not to believe but also undertakes to ensure that this freedom is respected and made effective.

After establishing the principle that "*The Republic shall not recognise and shall not pay any salary or subsidy to any religious body*", Article 2 states that: "*Nevertheless, the said budgets may cover expenditure relating to the work of chaplaincies that are designed to guarantee freedom of worship in public establishments such as secondary and primary schools, hospices, asylums and prisons.*»

This has enabled the courts, in the event of conflict, to interpret the law in such a way that the principle of the freedom of worship takes precedence over the principle of not subsidising religious worship".

Moreover, the Law of Separation did not prevent the Paris Mosque from being built in 1920 on municipal property and with a public subsidy. The principle of not subsidising religious worship had little influence on the wish to express a debt of gratitude to Muslim soldiers who died for France.

ii.   Islam: a spiritual force or political exploitation

Islam as a form of spirituality has long been peacefully practiced in France by thousands of Muslims without causing any problems with regard to the law of 1905.

On the one hand, the representatives of the Muslim faith, like the representatives of other faiths, in a dispassionate and transparent dialogue with the public authorities, and in the context of the work done by various committees (Stasi, Machelon, ...), together try, with all due respect for the spirit of the law of 1905, to find solutions to concrete problems relating to the Muslim faith such as: the building of places of worship, matching supply with the demand for specific types of burial sites, ritual slaughter, the organisation of pilgrimages, the training of those who have religious responsibilities and the establishment of chaplaincies.

The French Council of the Muslim Faith also promotes the values of moderate Islam through its imams and other religious leaders to prevent any practices that do not embody its values. And despite the difficulties arising from the fact that this is a relatively new institution, notable progress has been made.

On the other hand, there is increasing political exploitation of the Muslim religion, which is presented as a threat to peaceful co-existence.

The debates on "full-face veils", "national identity", "secularism" or the Islamisation of France" may have caused such strong feelings of uneasiness among the young people of France that they have withdrawn into their communities and feel that they are no longer accepted, no longer taken into consideration and perhaps even discriminated against. The constant doubts as to the compatibility of their "culture" and their "religious beliefs" with life in France pose a challenge to their identity.

As a result, even those who were not asserting their difference in terms of their culture or in the way they worship find themselves compelled to assert the identity that is being imposed on them.

The result is that at the same time as an increase in a so-called radical expression of faith, which fortunately only concerns a minority, there is also a rise in racism and Islamophobia, spreading a feeling of unease throughout the entire country.

In short, rather than condemn the social and political causes of a number of real problems, the debate has increasingly focused on their allegedly cultural and religious origins.

Islam has therefore been taken out of the cultural sphere and become a political issue. Confusion has in numerous cases finally led to an often irrational fear of everything that is "Muslim".

iii.   Co-operation between religious communities and between them and the public authorities

The importance of inter-faith dialogue for Muslims

Muslims have an obligation to be open to others. The openness expected of Muslims in general, and of those living in France in particular, means that they must practice and encourage dialogue with others and with those who are "other".

This openness to others, with all due respect for their differences, is the very foundation of human relations as intended by Allah. The Koran says: *"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (Chapter 49 The Dwellings para.13).*

Such dialogue and exchanges are the best way to get to know one another, to acknowledge one another and build a better future together, in complete peace and security, with no fear or prejudice.

In the "founding statutes"of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), it is stated that the aim of the CFCM is to "encourage dialogue between religions". The CFCM embodies the values of openness and moderation, and as a result it is a very much sought after partner in exchanges and dialogue with the other religions of France.

The nature of inter-faith dialogue

In order to have a dialogue, there must be at least two parties involved if not three (Christians, Jews, and Muslims). And indeed we can see that both sides are willing to take part in discussions and dialogue.

We all understand that our common aim is not to convince the other that our religion is better, or that one of us is right and the other wrong where a specific issue is concerned, but that although our religions may be different, both believe in love and respect for one's neighbour. And last but not least, they are a source of enrichment for each and every one of us.

Our encounters are guided by the principle of tolerance and this allows us to listen without judging, thus overcoming some of our prejudices.

There are three ways in which dialogue can take place:
−   We can dialogue face to face, i.e. talk about our respective beliefs, our founding texts and the way we see things…
−   We can dialogue side by side, i.e. tackle matters that we as believers consider to be the problems facing today's society (violence, women's place in society, abortion/euthanasia, organ donation, etc.)
−   We can take action together, i.e. carry out joint projects.

Peace and "Living Together" depend on mutual understanding and mutual understanding is one of the principles which form the true foundations of our different traditions: love of the One God and love of one's neighbour.

With regard to the need to love one's neighbour, the Prophet Mohammed (PSL) said: "*None of you will be a true believer if you do not want for your brother what you want for yourselves.*"

In the Holy Koran God said: "*We have given a law and a way of life to each of you. Had God wanted, He could have made you into one nation, but He wanted to see what use each community would make of what He had given it. Compete with each other in good deeds. All of you will return to God who will tell you the truth in the matter of your differences.*" (Chapter *5, the Table spread with food, para.48*).

Faced with fanaticism and extremism on all sides, believers and humanists from all cultures and religions have a duty to bring communities and peoples together. We must not confine ourselves to an "ideal", and cut ourselves off from reality but build bridges where others would build walls!

Bodies taking part in inter-faith dialogue

The Muslims of France take an active part in inter-faith dialogue through institutional bodies or by chairing encounters on inter-faith dialogue, at both national and regional level.

The Conference of Religious Leaders in France (CRCF)
The members of the CRCF are the main Representatives of the different religions in France. This body was set up in November 2010. The CFCM is represented on this body by two main religious leaders:
•   the President of the CFCM ;
•   and the Vice-President of the CFCM, who is responsible for inter-faith dialogue.

The Islamo-Christian Forum (FIC)
This forum comprises some fifty Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders who meet to discuss selected themes. At the last meeting, which took place in Lyons in December 2014, the themes chosen for the discussions were "extremist tendencies" and "radicalisation" in each of the religions.

The Group of Islamo-Christian households
Since 1977 a number of Islamo-Christian couples have decided to meet regularly to discuss their commitment as a couple and to make it easier to live together with their cultural and religious differences, to share their experience, and deepen their faith.

Inter-Religious Dialogue Encounters at national and regional level.

The CFCM and the Regional Councils of the Muslim Faith (CRCMs)[2] are regularly invited to take part in or to chair Encounters and Colloquies with the representatives of other Faiths .

Conclusion

In conclusion let us once more express the wish that this year will be the year of mutual awareness and understanding!

Everyone must help to bring down walls and barriers, to allay fears and anxieties; everyone must give full meaning to the values of respect and fraternity.

National cohesion and the genuinely peaceful co-existence, to which everyone aspires, in France and throughout Europe, are at stake.

3.   Contribution by Ms Marguerite A. Peeters, Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Culture, Director of the Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, Brussels

Living together is a matter to which great attention needs to be paid throughout the world.

In certain regions of the world the civil state still has to be established or consolidated. In Europe it has been operational for several centuries. The State lays down the laws governing the life of the community and ensures that they apply to all citizens without discrimination. It is, notably, forbidden to harm another human being because of his beliefs or his religion.

However, the problems facing us today make us aware of the state's limitations. The State alone cannot create the climate of trust and love that is needed to build a community. That requires the commitment of men and women who, in today's multicultural societies, come from different cultures and religions.

Today's secular Judeo-Christian West was united by common values which, not so long ago, were referred to as the "*social contract*". The expression "social contract" came from a combination of *society's contract* (in other words the values that are common to a specific society, which was then more or less united) and *the governmental contract* (in other words the contract between society and the government it has mandated to represent it).

The secularisation and transition to postmodernity that have taken place over the last fifty years have accelerated while different waves of immigration have been breaking on European shores and borders. The causes of our societies' loss of identity are therefore both internal and external. A great many people today no longer feel represented by politicians and sometimes not by the laws of their country either. The civil state is of course continuing to operate but almost mechanically, might one say, for the social contract of Western modernity has been irretrievably lost; the common core of values has been undermined. And both citizens and the State are asking themselves "Who are we? Are we one people? Is it possible for all of us to become one single people?

This atmosphere of social fragmentation brings with it serious threats not only to peace and security but to every individual's happiness. Not only politicians but men and women at the grassroots of society are becoming aware of the urgent need to once again become a single community and one people.

Law – the *European Human Rights Convention*, Constitutions and domestic laws – and political norms are an inadequate response to this aspiration. We all know that externally imposed rules and regulations have no lasting effectiveness if they are not recognised by individuals themselves to be "*right*". In order to create a people, the individuals who are to constitute that people must meet one another, talk with one another, get to know one another, respect one another, work together as brothers and sisters in building society and discovering what they have in common.

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[2] These are the regional branches of the CFCM in each of the French Regions.

Article One of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (a document with a substantial Judeo-Christian input) asserts that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". The Declaration talks about conscience, reason and brotherhood. We are all endowed with reason and conscience, and a heart, and we are therefore all capable of recognising what is genuine, good, true, loving, and truly fraternal and capable of making the appropriate personal choices.

It is essential and urgent that in political speeches, in education and culture, we highlight once again the things that all human beings have in common – conscience, reason and heart – by placing more emphasis than in the past on the heart and on love – two words which have all too often been missing in Western discourse, while in other societies they take their rightful place. It is not enough to condemn hate speech. We also need to encourage people to speak in a way that shows that they esteem and love their fellow citizens, for the opposite of hatred is not secular neutrality but sincere love of one's fellow human beings.

The teaching of monotheist religions helps to promote brotherly love and fraternal citizenship. Allow me to quote from the Nostra Aetate Declaration of the Second Vatican Council : "All men form but one community This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men" (NA, 1).

Citizens of cultures which are traditionally foreign to Europe often have a greater awareness than indigenous Europeans of the community, fraternity, the family, children and the need to have respect and to care for the elderly . They can help to free our cultures of their individualism, the cause of many a woe, provided that we show that we appreciate these values and welcome them. Education today probably does too much to encourage consumerist and individualist life styles and this will have to change.

In these times of fragmentation, sincere and brotherly acceptance of the contribution made by the heritage of non-Western cultures to promoting the complete human development of every individual is particularly necessary and rewarding. Intercultural and inter-faith dialogue should not concern only extremism and terrorism but also the real problems currently facing European societies: falling birth-rates and the challenges to the concept of the family based on marriage between a man and a women as the "fundamental group unit of society" (as stated in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[3]), the abandonment and loneliness of the elderly, unemployment, the loss of bearings if not the despair of many young people, the crisis in the relationship between human beings and creation and environmental problems, for example. Such a dialogue on issues which concern everyone and everyone's happiness, could take place on a permanent basis. It would need larger areas shared by indigenous Europeans and the communities that have recently settled on the continent. Should European countries not confront their own sicknesses with lucidity, and with the help all of their citizens?

The aim of intercultural and inter-faith dialogue should not be to acquire formal or theoretical knowledge of others' value systems with a view to understanding them only superficially and organising our co-existence in practical terms, but to genuinely get to know people who share the same humanity, to dialogue with *brothers and sisters* whose genuinely human experience can enrich society as a whole. In other words, our approach should not be utilitarian but sincere, personal and friendly.

In a speech which he made in Al-Azhar on 28 December 2014 and which became famous around the whole world, the Egyptian President, Abd Al-Fattah Al-Sisi, said that Islam was in need of a religious revolution and that extremism was destroying the Islamic nation. At a recent inter-faith conference on the subject of the family held in the Lebanon, I heard a number of Grand Muftis make some very similar remarks. It was, moreover, their remarks which helped me prepare the comments that I am submitting to you today.

I would like to suggest that it would be a good idea if Europe were also to undertake such a revolution, for there is also a form of extremism in Europe, not religious but secular extremism, which seeks, in the name of democracy, to impose on everyone, rights, freedom and equality, and social projects that are incompatible with what was culturally recognised as universal only a few decades ago. In the fields of bioethics (the beginning and end of life, human procreation, and sexual identity), culture and education (the rights of parents to educate their children, the content of national education systems, etc.) in particular, some of the

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[3] Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

policies and laws of our countries are often incompatible with the beliefs of a large number of citizens and with the teachings of major religions. In such a context, genuine respect for the right of conscientious objection is of critical importance and it is very important that it should be included in civic education.

Asserting that there is a right to blasphemy, to give a recent example, is symptomatic of the secularism about which we are speaking. It is a way of interpreting the right to freedom of expression which does not strengthen brotherly relations but, to the contrary, tends to provoke a violent response. Blasphemy is of no use to society and by no means universal.

If we want to foster unity and friendship between the different peoples living in Europe, it is important to observe that a certain form of Western secularism is fuelling the anti-Western stance of populations, for whom transcendence and the sacred are of great importance. As a result it is conceivable that secularist societies may become a breeding ground for various forms of extremism. We would be ill-advised not to take this fact into account or to deny it, as it could prove to be a time bomb.

The multicultural situation of Western societies is a historic opportunity that they should seize so as to once again embark on a journey towards authentic consensus on the content of democracy, rights, freedom and equality at a time when such consensus is only superficial. Religious and ethnic diversity will then be acknowledged as assets for everyone. State neutrality must not mean that the State is indifferent to that which is the common good of all its citizens. Harmonious co-existence on the contrary entails that everyone, State and citizens, seek out what is good for all of us: peace, justice and freedom for all. And we must all stand together in refusing any violation of the values that are sacred to the communities that make up our societies.

Our noble efforts on behalf of men and women and on behalf of the common good will only be successful if they are made with determination.

4. Contribution by Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

I would like to thank the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media for inviting me to take part in this very timely debate on freedom of religion and how to build inclusive democratic societies in a Europe which is growing more and more diverse, not least in terms of religious affiliation and practice.

It is crucial that we find ways for people of different faiths and beliefs to co-exist peacefully. The terrorist attacks which we have witnessed in Europe over the last months show the devastating effects of violent extremism and radicalisation.

The Council of Europe wishes to make a strong contribution to the fight against radicalisation leading to terrorism. The Secretary General has prepared an Action Plan of targeted activities, firmly based on the respect of human rights, rule of law and democracy, to support and reinforce the efforts of our member States. This Action Plan will be adopted at the Ministerial Meeting organised by the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels in May. Three of those activities are of particular relevance to your discussion today:

The Council of Europe intends to actively undermine the destructive messages of violent extremists by the use of counter narratives. This includes raising the profile of and providing a platform for religious leaders and academics who can speak with authority about how the activities of terrorist organisations are in conflict with religion.

First, the Secretary General will convene a group of leading figures to draw up a reference document for better understanding of religious and convictional issues. This document will be broadly distributed and made available for a number of different purposes, including education and training.

Second, the format of the Council of Europe Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue will be adapted to make it a forum for discussion of issues relating to the prevention of radicalisation.

The international community has also become more and more aware of the role of religion under the aspect of the democratic management of cultural diversity, the need to organise in our society the living together of all its members "as equals in dignity".

"Equals in dignity" is the title of the "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue", launched by the Committee of Ministers in 2008, which also stood at the beginning of the Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue, to foster open, transparent and regular dialogue with the main religious organisations and communities, as well as with representatives of non-convictional communities about the practicalities of intercultural interaction, governance and competences.

There is an obvious need for dialogue between religious communities themselves – interreligious dialogue in the strictest meaning of the term. Public authorities have no role within this interreligious dialogue, but they can and should encourage religious communities and non-religious believers to come together and reflect upon their common task to contribute to a peaceful democratic society, protecting human rights for everyone and safeguarding the rule of law.

The "White Paper" made the point that the important role of religious communities with regard to dialogue means that there should also be better dialogue between religious communities on the one hand and public authorities on the other. Religious practice is part of contemporary human life. It therefore cannot and should not be outside the sphere of interest of public authorities, although the State must remain neutral and impartial.

As our continent's guardian of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe has developed a particular sensitivity for the role of religion in democracy. Our concept of secularism (laïcité) is based on dialogue and recognition of certain fundamental principles:

o   the principle of freedom (of thought, conscience and religion; to belong or not to a religion, to practice it or not to practice it, or to change religion) (Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights);

o   the principle of non-discrimination (equality of rights and duties, including respect for others, independently of their conviction or religion);

o   the principle of mutual autonomy of religion and politics;

o   the principle of neutrality and impartiality of public authorities with regard to religion and religious communities.

The third activity under the Council of Europe Action Plan to fight radicalisation leading to terrorism which I would like to mention is democratic education. I very much look forward to tomorrow's discussions in preparation of Mr Legendre's report on a European Framework of competences for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue. I will therefore not go into detail about this now but will only underline the importance of developing key competences for democratic citizenship for use in school curricula across Europe, also with regard to tackling increasing religious diversity.

We must define the skills which young people across Europe need in order to live peacefully in diverse societies. This is not about teaching young people what to think, it is about teaching them how to think. Pupils must be taught how to summarise the different positions in a conflict, and how to identify the common ground. And they need to know which rights are universal. We will not be able to bring together diversity and democracy without this kind of understanding.

We cannot allow ourselves to be oversensitive to cultural or religious differences in this regard. There is a level of critical thinking of which every democratic citizen should be capable, regardless of their own personal beliefs.

It will of course be up to each Council of Europe member State to adapt the European Framework of competences as they see fit, but we are seeing a genuine interest for a more common approach to the promotion of our shared, democratic values to the next generation.

5. **Contribution by Professor Jean-Paul Willaime, Director of Studies at the Ecole pratique des hautes études (EPHE) of Paris**

The democratic benefits of inclusive secularity

My main argument, which I sum up in the term "inclusive secularity", is that integrating religions into the public life of the community, within the framework of the separation between Religions and State, is beneficial to democracy. If religions are not reduced to their private dimensions or their individual dimensions, it is through a secularity of recognition and dialogue, and not through a secularity of exclusion, that it will be made possible for them to be an asset, and not an obstacle, to democratic life and order.

Introduction: The paradoxes of the present socio-religious situation

I should like straight away to point to four paradoxes: 1) While a growing number of Europeans declare that they have "no religion", never before has so much been said about religion in the media and in public debate. 2) While it was long believed that greater modernity meant a diminished religious dimension, it is now being realised that greater modernity does not necessarily mean a religious dimension that is reduced, but one that is of a different kind. In practice, in our current highly secularised ultra-modernity, religions continue to challenge and fascinate, either positively or negatively. And intransigent attitudes are observed in both the religious and the secular worlds. 3) Secularisation does not mean the end of the religious dimension, but a weakening of the institutional and cultural framework for religion, in other words the way in which it is taught. The beneficiaries of that weakening are those in the salvation business and demagogues. The weakening of religious institutions is paradoxically going hand in hand with a boom in forms of religion "untamed" to varying degrees, as well as the development of cross-border religious networks. This is the era of fluid, porous and dispersed religiousness. 4) In Europe today, the situation is characterised less by misunderstandings and friction between different religions – although those do exist – than by misunderstandings and friction between people who are religious and those who are not. The challenge at the moment is how to view the place and role of religions in pluralist democracies, in other words how to regard secularity.

I shall consider in turn: 1) how to understand religious phenomena and the believers who, in highly diverse ways, claim a religious dimension; 2) understanding secularity: what it is and what it is not; 3) the existence of a secularity of intelligence, recognition and dialogue, and the increasing promotion of that inclusive secularity; 4) the democratic benefits of active participation by religions and beliefs in living together. I shall conclude with the risk that social excommunication of religions would bring.

1. **Understanding religious phenomena and the believers who, in highly diverse ways, claim a religious dimension**

As historical, social and cultural realities, religious facts seem to be collective, physical, symbolic and experienced facts:[4]

➢ collective facts (when people gather together): some individuals share something, feel that they are part of the same world and get together with some degree of regularity. The religious dimension brings people together (one of the origins of the word "religion" is *religare*, to tie together) and gives rise to collective feelings, communities, movements, institutions;

➢ physical facts (traces, works): it is not just people who are religious, but also texts, images, music, practices, buildings and objects – archaeological, literary, artistic and cultural objects which can be seen;

➢ symbolic facts (representations and their meanings): representations of the world, of oneself, of others, of the divinity or of invisible forces; theologies and doctrines, moral systems. Chiming with the other origin of the word "religion", *relegere*, to reread, the religious dimension appears to be a perpetual reading and rereading of traditions, signs and texts of which interpretations are debated, challenged and renewed. In other words, religious expressions should be regarded as objects of intellectual rationalisation, the history of theologies being quite closely related to the history of philosophical thought;

➢ facts which are experienced and felt on an individual and collective scale. It would be a serious epistemological error to forget that religious representations and practices are experienced by millions of people who regard them, to varying degrees, as an essential part of their lives. The experienced and felt

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[4] Cf. the chapter entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un fait religieux ?" ("What is a religious fact?") in *Enseigner les faits religieux. Quels enjeux ?* (edited by Dominique Borne and Jean-Paul Willaime), Paris, Armand Colin, 2007, pp. 37-57.

aspects of religion quite simply derive from the fact that the symbolic forms of the human condition that are religious phenomena represent feelings.

Knowing and understanding religious facts never signifies any kind of either philosophical invalidation or social and cultural rejection of the symbolising of life through religious expressions. On the contrary, this is a way of knowing more about, and giving a broad and varied audience a better understanding of, what religious realities mean to those who experience them. For their members, religions provide resources in terms of identity and ethics, interlinking the individual and the collective, the local and the global. In our era of globalisation, which may induce a turning inwards and a fear of others, this is far from negligible. In particular, religions offer three kinds of "senses" or "sensations": a sense of significance (the meaning of life and death, of happiness and unhappiness); a sense of direction (for life, ethical standards guiding behaviour); sensations (individual and collective ways of feeling individual and collective emotions). So they are social realities *sui generis*, albeit ones which change and take a very wide range of forms from one period to another, from one cultural sphere to another. Religious phenomena constitute symbolic infrastructures through which human beings attempt to achieve symbolic control of their lives and to find their place in space and time, from both the synchronic and the diachronic viewpoint. Those phenomena provide a sense in particular for the two fundamental social relationships of partnership and parenthood. Thus we have here a social and cultural phenomenon necessitating a secularity of intelligence where symbolism is concerned, allowing for the fact that human beings are also driven by the three dimensions of sense and sensation already referred to.

Religious groupings get the people who take part in them very much involved: like political sensitivities, they have affective and activist dimensions. And like all realities based on activism and belief, they may, in certain circumstances, give rise to intolerance, even fanaticism and violence. But it would be a grave mistake to reduce religious phenomena to such excesses. That would be like rejecting politics on the ground that political ideologies have led to totalitarianism. As a socio-cultural reality, quite simply as a human reality, religions may represent both a good and genuine assets in the same way as, in certain expressions and circumstances, they may represent a danger to democracy and human rights. I am sometimes surprised to find that some people, including advocates of secularism, call religions into question because they do not come up to their own ideals of peace, fraternity, love. That is surprising, because that perception is based on a very idealistic concept of religion. It is true that, with some happy exceptions, religious individuals are not saints, just men and women like everyone else. Like the politicians who can similarly be accused of failing to live up to the ideals which they proclaim and base their election campaigns on. But that is not a reason for demonising religion or politics, or even both. Let us get back down to earth, please, and consider religion as it actually is, not ideal religion. Thus the question is that of how to view secularity so that religions are a positive factor in democratic living together, and not a threat.

2. Understanding secularity: what it is and what it is not

While secularity is not, in the current socio-religious situation, being fundamentally called into question, the way in which it is understood and applied is being queried. This leads to debate and arguments about how to view religions' place and role in democracies based both on a separation between churches and state and on respect for freedom of conscience, thought and religion.

It is worth noting that the English language makes a clear distinction between secularity and secularism, between the secular state and the secularist state[5]. While a state's and its public authorities' secularity is a vital component of a liberal society, secularism is an ideological position seeking to promote a secularist order in the name of individualist values proper to it. Secularity does not mean a secularist state, but a secular one, or, in democratic societies, a state that is neutral and impartial towards its nationals' religions and beliefs; in other words a state which, as a state, professes no particular religion or atheistic philosophy of life. That secular state, whose secularity should extend to its institutions and public services (and their staff), need not have a secular society. The members of that society may opt for a very wide range of religions and philosophies, and states may take account in different ways of this component of civil society, making its contributions an integral part of public life. That secularity, with the state in principle adopting a neutral position to people's concepts of life, rests on the following three elements:

1) freedom of conscience, thought and religion, which includes the freedom to have, or not to have, a religion, freedom to change religion and freedom to practise or not to practise the chosen religion (limited solely by the need to comply with the law and to respect democracy and human rights);

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[5] "Secularism vs. Secularity in Europe", www.strasbourgconsortium.org (2011).

2) equality of rights and duties for all citizens, irrespective of their religious or philosophical identification, i.e. non-discrimination by the state and public authorities against people because of their religious or philosophical affiliations;

3) the mutual independence of state and religions, meaning that not only is the state free vis-à-vis religions, but also religions are free vis-à-vis the state (subject to compliance with the law and human rights in a democracy). That independence is practised in the framework of the various systems of relations between religions and state.

The neutrality, in accordance with these three principles, of both the state and the public authorities is not relativistic, but is part of the bedrock of common values of human rights, the rule of law, public safety and public morality. Secularity has an emancipating virtue as opposed to all those religious or political concepts which would call into question those shared values and the fundamental acquired rights of freedom and equality on which they are based. Secularity is not the property of unbelievers, although in certain countries (I am thinking of Belgium) secularity is recognised as a secular philosophy of life alongside religious concepts of life. In other words, secularity is a common good for all, believers and unbelievers alike. The state's secular neutrality also betokens equitable treatment for the different faiths. The state must not be more secular vis-à-vis one religion than another: secularity cannot apply one rule to some religions and another to others! Secularity does not mean making religion invisible, even less so a specific religion. And secular neutrality, depending on country and circumstances, may be kinder or less kind to religions. It is undeniably the case at the moment that the tragic events of 2015 in Paris and Copenhagen, those instances of terrorism claimed to be in the name of Islam, have given rise to tensions in the secular sphere. In this context, some people have revived a vision of religion, and particularly of Islam, identifying it with fanaticism and obscurantism. Both history and present times show us that religions can be used as instruments, and that invoking that God who may be a bringer of peace and encourage altruistic action can also be deadly and engender fanaticism of various kinds.

Hence the importance of secularity as a defence against clerical and absolutist manoeuvring that may occur when religions want to impose their standards on their members by force (risk of internal clericalism and sectarian excesses), or even to extend those standards to society as a whole (risk of external clericalism and caesaropapism). Religions may lead to inward-looking communities, if they aim to "confine" their members within their network, cutting them off as far as possible from the society around them, or even conveying to them a view of world society, or of a specific society, such as Western society, as a diabolical reality to be shunned and combated. Let us acknowledge that, today, while those risks are genuine and not virtual in all too many countries, they are low in most countries of Europe, although a few young and not-so-young people who are losing their bearings may be turned into fanatics by religious, or so-called religious, leaders (as some have been through radical political concepts justifying violence). In other words, in democratic countries, rather than relying on a defensive concept of secularity with a view to protecting society from religions, it is easier to embrace a proactive and inclusive concept of secularity which, sufficiently sure of itself, can positively take into account the contributions made by the religious components of society. Thus we can realise anew that religions also nurture mutually supportive and highly altruistic commitments, that they are reservoirs of commitments and hopes that can socialise people, particularly young people, within a structured and structuring set of standards, protecting them against pessimism and giving them a desire to act, however difficult the present may be. This is also a way of preventing that deadly radicalisation which may be tempting to persons who are losing their bearings and seeking certainties. It is not a secularity which excludes the religious that is the best bastion against fanaticism which either is, or claims to be, religious, but a secularity of inclusion recognising religiousness as a social and cultural fact which has to be taken into account.

3. The existence of a secularity of intelligence, recognition and dialogue, and the increasing promotion of that inclusive secularity

In Europe various forms of secularity prevail which recognise religions, i.e. forms of secularity which combine mutual independence for state and religions and an explicit taking into account of religions' place and role in society. Respect for the principles of the secularity mentioned above does not seem to be incompatible with various forms of recognition of religions.

When I refer to "secularity of recognition", I particularly mean the social recognition of religious communities. While, of course, that recognition leads in the legal sphere to specific frameworks offered to religious groups, it is the aspect of social recognition in particular that I should like to emphasise, legal recognition being merely the legal counterpart of a sociocultural process taking account of religions and their contributions to community life. Religions are socially recognised when they are regarded as specific social and cultural realities, voluntary groupings, of course, but particular ones of which account is taken in specific ways, including within the legal frameworks put in place in each country. There are five dimensions in which states

give religions social recognition: 1) a specifically legal dimension, with special legal frameworks being offered to them for their religious activities (including, in France, religious associations and religious congregations); 2) a specifically social dimension, taking account of the contributions they make in the fields of social solidarity and education; 3) an ethical dimension, consulting them on issues involving concepts of the human being; 4) a more political dimension when states provide for partnership and co-operation relationships with religious groupings to work towards shared objectives; 5) a more symbolic dimension when states get religions involved, or more often the majority religion, to mark national unity on certain occasions (deaths, disasters,…). The fact that these various forms of secularity of recognition are recent creations in several countries shows that these cases are not the result of potentially obsolete traditional historical heritages. No, these recently introduced forms of relationships between religions and states are considered appropriate arrangements for relations with religions in democratic societies which respect human rights. Here are two present-day examples. Portugal's law on religious freedom, of 22 June 2001, explicitly sets out a dual principle of both separation and co-operation: "The State shall co-operate with the churches and religious communities established in Portugal, taking into consideration their representativeness, namely in view of the promotion of human rights, of the integral development of each person and the values of peace, freedom, solidarity and tolerance.". There could be no clearer statement of the fact that separation and recognition enable religious groups meeting the criteria to engage in explicit co-operation with the state on promoting and developing the fundamental values of democracy. The state, for its part, agrees to take account of the contribution made by religions to its public-interest objectives. While the Constitution of Poland (1997), in paragraph 3 of Article 25, specifically expresses what I term a separation of recognition: "The relationship between the State and churches and other religious organisations shall be based on the principle of respect for their autonomy and the mutual independence of each in its own sphere, as well as on the principle of co-operation for the individual and the common good.". There is here an explicit recognition of religions' contribution to shared values.

"Secularity of intelligence" is today manifested through the development, encouraged by the Council of Europe, of education about religions for all pupils. Knowledge of religious traditions and their developments and an understanding of different religious practices are vital parts of a school education in our pluralist societies. Education about pluralism being one dimension of citizenship education. Teaching pupils that, while there are reasoned and reasonable disagreements and divergences, it is necessary to reject the intolerable (racism, anti-Semitism, negation of history, incitement to hatred, failure to honour fundamental human rights, and so on) and to uphold with conviction a few shared values which are vital to living together.

4.   The democratic benefits of active participation by religions and beliefs in living together[6]

The promotion by religions of civic engagement (and discouraging of abstention from voting) is now frequent, thus helping to counteract disenchantment with, and the loss of credibility of, politics. When there is a risk of refugees, foreigners and French nationals in extremely vulnerable positions (including the elderly and persons with disabilities) not being treated humanely, and in the face of the risks of stigmatisation of certain population groups (such as Roma), religious authorities bring into play the ethics of brotherhood promoted by their religions. Some activists from voluntary groups draw on their religions' ethical resources to undertake activities showing solidarity with others and to challenge the public authorities about their duty to act humanely. In the ecological sphere, the need to introduce limits on resource exploitation (sustainable development) and to safeguard an environment fit to live in, inter alia by preserving our climate, leads ecological activists to seek religions' support in advocating a simpler lifestyle, including the regular practice of fasting. But religions are active not only in the field of social ethics, but also in that of cultural and religious diversity, seeking to make that diversity an asset rather than an obstacle to integration. In response to those who warn of a so-called "clash of civilisations" whereby religions oppose one another, particularly Christianity and Islam, religions are intensifying interfaith relations and developing interfaith dialogue at local, regional, state/national (e.g. the "Conférence des Responsables de Culte en France" started in 2010) and international levels. Those initiatives are positively received by municipalities, for example in Lyon's 9th district, with its dialogue between Jews and Muslims and focus on living together, by regions, as in the Region of Alsace, whose Inter-Faith Committee organises "Rendez-vous avec les religions" events), and by international organisations such as the Council of Europe, particularly through its "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: Living Together As Equals in Dignity", and the Alliance of Civilizations supported by the UN.

Religions make their voices heard and dare to argue about other subjects, such as sexuality, gender, filiation, surrogate motherhood, medically-assisted procreation and the risk of eugenism, the end of life and

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[6] I am taking the liberty of referring to my own study: "L'expression des religions, une chance pour la démocratie" (The expression of religions, a chance for democracy), in *Projet* n°342 (*Religions, une affaire publique ?*), October 2014, pp. 5-14.

the risk of euthanasia. In this last sphere in particular, some secular voices have been seeking to confine churches to matters within their remit: spiritual issues and worship. As if religions dealt only with the soul and with what goes on inside their places of worship! Is there not a tendency to take a selective view of religions' role in the public sphere? A positive view in some fields, including social ethics, but a negative one in others (particularly sexual and family ethics)? But there cannot be one rule for religious groups' participation in public debate on some subjects and another rule when other subjects are discussed, and the legitimacy of that participation does not depend on the degree to which it conforms to current secular tendencies. Democratic secularity which is not authoritarian should not reject or regard as illegitimate religious contributors because they allegedly oppose certain developments, even if those have been made lawful. There are, for instance, different ways of viewing human gender and equality between women and men. Provided that they respect gender equality, and on that condition only, there is no reason why a secular state should dismiss some concepts of human gender and accept others instead. In other words, tensions are inevitable between religions and the dominant tendencies within society. Those tensions are not only inevitable, but also structural, providing evidence that secularity is in good health. It is in fact secularity's duty, within the framework of the law, to enable those tensions to be properly expressed rather than eliminate them to the benefit of just one of the sides of the argument, the secular or the religious (especially because there is also internal debate within both the religious and the secular worlds). Paul Ricoeur referred to this as "a positive secularity of confrontations" which does justice to the diversity of civil society.

Conclusion: The risk of social excommunication of religions

There is room, between the community-based separation of religious identities and a public space universal only through the ignoring of identities, for a socially aware and secular recognition of religions in the public sphere. The values of democracy, particularly human rights, are undermined if they are not resolutely conveyed and legitimised across specific cultures, whether religious or philosophical, and supported by organisations with a broad social basis. "The time has gone when the community of citizens had to be won over through the freeing of individuals from their symbolic roots; it is now more the case that those symbolic roots can help to shape communities of citizens which are threatened by the combined effects of individualisation and globalisation".[7] While democratic humanism has often been built up in opposition to religions, the latter may, in a disillusioned secular world, become its precious guardians. On condition, of course, that the different religions, on the basis of the resources of their own identity, explain how they support democratic humanism and how they can help to socialise the younger generations within that context. This requires, inter alia, advanced training for religious officials enabling them to exercise their responsibility in a secularised and pluralist European context which, while it allows the expression and contributions of religions, is willing to submit to none of them.

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[7] As I wrote in my contribution, entitled "Reconfigurations ultramodernes" (Ultramodern reconfigurations)(p.155), to the March/April 2007 volume of *Esprit* on "Les effervescences religeuses dans le monde" (Religious effervescence in the world).