



EUROPEAN INTERRELIGIOUS FORUM **FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

- *Promote freedom of religion and belief*
- *Promote religious tolerance*
- *Promote interfaith dialog*
- *Promote knowledge of religions*



Purposes

EIFRF is an interfaith group created in January 2013, which Steering Committee includes religious leaders from various faiths and from various European countries, united in order to:

- *Promote freedom of religion and belief*
- *Promote religious tolerance*
- *Promote interfaith dialog*
- *Promote knowledge of religions*

Its scope is primarily Europe, but is not limited to it.

Partners

The Forum has a network of official partners, in different fields:

- Scholars
- HR lawyers
- Religious personalities
- HR defenders
- Religious organizations
- HR organizations

Means

The means that the Forum uses to achieve its purposes are:

- Meeting with decisions makers at national, European or international levels.
- Providing them with documents of high quality, either produced directly by the Forum or by its partners.
- Activating the partners' network to defend any cause or initiative picked by the Board.

- Producing properties (videos, books, magazines) forwarding the purpose of the Forum and having them properly distributed, either to journalists, decision makers, people interested in religious affairs, and the public at large.
- Organizing symposiums, official meetings, informal meetings and roundtables, on the questions of religious freedom, interfaith dialog and religious tolerance.
- Publishing a regular newsletter that will be sent by e-mail to all interested people.

Legal existence

EIFRF is an unincorporated association, and its actions may be either funded by its members themselves or by the partners who may want to contribute to a specific event.

The Steering Committee of EIFRF



Dominique Kounkou

Dominique Kounkou is an evangelical pastor. He is attorney at law and PhD in International Public Law. He is known for his work as sociologist of religions, and his many books and writings which have been already published. He has been organizing symposiums and meetings on the subject of religious freedom since more than 10 years, defending the rights of religious minorities. He is Honorary President of the Council of Christian Churches of an African

Approach in Europe.



Petar Gramatikoff

Petar Gramatikoff is a hierodeacon of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. He has a Master's Degree in Theology and has been awarded a title of Doctor (Didaskalos) of the Universal Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1999. He has been teaching theology since more than 20 years and is also currently chief expert in religious questions in the municipality of Plovdiv. He is vice

President of the Eastern European Forum for Dialogue-Bridges NGO. He has been working for years in the field of Human rights, defending the traditional view of Orthodox Church in terms of respect for all beliefs, beside all theological conceptions.



Hans Noot

Johannus D. T. (Hans) Noot is Coordinator of Religious Education in Belgium and the Netherlands and advisor to Seminaries and Institutes in Eastern Europe for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in organizational behavior from Brigham Young University (BYU) and

is currently working on a Ph.D. in organizational anthropology at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. He worked extensively for years for the promotion of Religious Freedom in Europe, Middle and East Asia and Middle East, and is the president of the Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief (www.noodtFoRB.eu) and a member of the International Advisory Board of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at BYU.



Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Hussaini

Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Hussaini is Research Fellow in Islamic Studies. He was educated at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Al-Azhar, and teaches courses in Arabic, Islamic theology and classical interpretation of Islamic sacred texts with relevance to Jewish-Muslim relations. His area of research is in comparative Islamic, Karaite and Rabbanite approaches to exegesis of Scripture in the Middle Ages. Teaching at Leo Baeck Rabbinical College, he has been involved in Interreligious issues since many years, promoting interfaith dialog and tolerance.



Karan Singh

Karan Singh is President of the Sikh Foundation, Switzerland. Under his direction, the Sikh Foundation built the first gurdwara («gateway to the Guru») in Europe, a Sikh temple, made in the traditional manner. He has been involved in religious interfaith dialog for peace on a long-term basis.



Father Aldo Natale Terrin

Aldo Natale Terrin is teacher of History of Religions and Cultural Anthropology at Urbino University, and teacher of Science of Religions at the Pastoral Liturgy Institute of S. Giustina, Padova. He is a catholic priest considered one of the top experts on new religions in Europe, with reputation of being very impartial in his findings and conclusions, and up-to-date on religious issues. He wrote lot of articles and books on the subject of religion, and articles about the ongoing process of “secularization” in Europe.



Eric Roux

Rev. Eric Roux is an ordained minister of the Church of Scientology. He performs his duties in the Church in Paris, France since more than 20 years. Writer, he works since many years at European level on the topics of religious freedom. He also has the position of President the Union of the Churches of Scientology in France.

Examples of activities of EIFRF

Freedom of Conscience: Tensions between Church, State and Religious Minorities in Family Issues

Side event 23 April 2013 – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Vital information on human rights standards provided for the Rudy Salles report on ‘Sectarian Influence on Minors’



On 23 April 2013, Mr. Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands, member of PACE, EPP) co-sponsored an event with Lord Dundee (UK, member of PACE, EDG). The European Interreligious Forum for Religious Forum (EIFRF) helped to organise the event during the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The main reason for the meeting was to provide information crucial to the discussion of a report in progress on “Sectarian Influence on Minors”, with Mr. Rudy Salles as rapporteur (France, member of the PACE). Mr. Salles, whilst invited to participate, was not able to attend.

Mr. Omtzigt, as the moderator, introduced the panelists by explaining that religious freedom issues were of significant concern in many countries of Europe. He spoke of the unfortunate developments in Hungary with regards to their recent law on the registration of religious groups and also his own country Netherlands, where there were religious tensions. He pointed out that whilst some approaches enabled religious communities to integrate and work together, others had proven to be unworkable. In this last category he identified the widely criticized French approach of isolating and targeting minority religious and made the point that it would not be advisable to export this to other European countries.

The attendees were told that this meeting was to be an open debate and they were free to discuss any points during the meeting. Mr. Omtzigt then gave the floor to Professor Marco Ventura (K.U. Leuven).



Mr. Ventura highlighted a number of key points that have been established in European jurisprudence and which closely relate to the report of Mr. Salles. These are as follows:

1. There is an obligation of neutrality and impartiality on the part of the state.
2. The State has no competence or legitimacy in assessing religious beliefs or even the way these beliefs are expressed.
3. Religious discrimination is not permissible. Religion cannot be used as grounds to make a decision *in abstracto* simply on the basis of another's belief system.
4. State distinction between religions and sects; State sponsored "cult prevention" activities through labelling, listing and targeting of individuals and groups based on a supposed 'sectarian' membership are incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

He underlined that governments cannot legitimately legislate or make any determination as to the 'validity' of a religion or classify religions as "good" or "bad", including using discriminatory concepts such as "cults" or "sects" Any legislation which attempts to discriminate between citizens based solely on their religious beliefs, or between religions based on any criteria would ultimately be condemned by the ECtHR. He also made it clear that when there are issues with regards to children and the family unit, the right of parents to educate their children in their own faith, whatever that may be, must be respected. The only restriction possible would be in the case where there was an actual proven harm to the child, but this could not include any theoretical position or *a priori* determination based on the parent's belief system.



Dr. Petar Gramatikov, a Doctor of Theology of the Universal Orthodox Church, working for the Bulgarian government on religious registration issues, explained the situation in Bulgaria with regards to religious minorities. He explained the attitude of the Soviet regime against religions and the following democratization of the country, pointing out that the Bulgarian authorities started to attack minority

religions as "sects", whether they were Muslim minorities, Christian minorities or new religious movements and that the country regressed in the direction of an authoritarian regime in this regard and did not favour religious diversity. He stressed how harmful this has been for citizens belonging to minority faiths and consequently how it is vital for a spirit of tolerance and diversity to be promoted in order to have a healthy society that would be a vehicle for human development.



The last speaker was Maître Christian Paturel, a French lawyer and also a member of the Jehovah Witnesses. Mr. Paturel, has already won a landmark case against France before the ECtHR after one of his books, critical of the French anti-religious movement, had been banned by the French courts. After eventually taking this to Strasbourg the French court decisions were

struck down, the ECtHR judges being quite critical of the national judicial process. The book is now available in France. Maitre Paturel also told the story of his own wife. She was employed by the French Administration and had an exemplary record in the field of Child Care for many years but after an anti-religious group (funded by the French government) informed her State employer that she was a member of the Jehovah Witnesses she was dismissed. On taking the case to court the State was ordered to reinstate her, only for her to be dismissed again on the same grounds. This has happened 3 times and after the fourth dismissal a criminal case was filed against the State. The case is still ongoing.

Participants were able to ask several questions to the panelists in order to clarify various points. Further details of the forum will be available on request.

EIFRF is an unincorporated forum whose board is composed of religious leaders from wide range of different faiths and various countries, united to promote freedom of religion and beliefs, religious tolerance and knowledge of religions throughout Europe. For more information go to www.eifrf.org

Email: eiforumrf@gmail.com

Conference/debate at EU Parliament

A cause for concern in Europe

Freedom of opinion, religion and belief

Persecution of, and discrimination against, minority-groups

Organized by:

- *The European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF)*

With the Partnership of

- *EMISCO (European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion)*
 - *The Gerard Noodt Foundation*
 - *United Sikhs International*
 - *Soteria International*
 - *CAPLC Europe*

This conference will be held

On the 16th of October 2013 (13:00 to 18:00)

In the EU parliament, rue Wiertz 60, 1047 Brussels.

Please make a reservation by sending your full name

Contact: Laure Ferrari 0032 228 45469,

laure.ferrari@europarl.europa.eu

Sponsored by Godfrey Bloom (EFDG)

Interpretation in French, English and Italian

Food, refreshments and hot drinks will be provided

This conference will be held on the 16th of October 2013 (13:00 to 18:00) in the EU parliament, rue Wiertz 60, 1047 Brussels. To reserve your place, please contact: Laure Ferrari 0032 228 45469, laure.ferrari@europarl.europa.eu

Freedom of belief, religion and opinion, as well as religious freedoms in general, are fundamental rights, guaranteed by numerous international treaties and conventions, including several European ones. Nevertheless, many recent reports describe a large number of infringements of these rights, even in European countries. Indeed, minorities of belief are increasingly subjected to discrimination in some European countries, or even to persecution, by means of various deleterious instruments, which give an appearance of legality but which, in reality, are at odds with European and international standards of Human Rights.

Because the believers in every religion, and the holders of any particular belief or opinion, are in the minority somewhere, the rights of the adherents of any faith or view are liable to infringement, as perpetrated by governments or as promoted by groups working as front-organizations for particular vested interests or for governments.

In this Conference, we will examine in detail the trend in Europe to increase restrictions on freedom of opinion, religion and belief, as well as the clandestine efforts of some governments to export discriminatory systems to other countries via European institutions, and the concrete effects of these things. We will examine the existing tools for protecting freedom of belief, religion and opinion (including international law, international jurisprudence and EU-jurisprudence). The speakers (in 2 different panels) will be representatives from various religious denominations, international experts in the relevant fields and specialist defenders of human rights.

Each panel-presentation will be followed by live debates.

Speakers

Bashy Quraishy

Chairman of ENAR Advisory Council
Chair of European Platform for Jewish/Muslim Cooperation
Secretary General of EMISCO

Professor Juan Ferreiro Gualguera

Full professorship of Ecclesiastical Law at University of Coruna
Former D/Director General for Promotion and Protection
of Religious Freedom at the Spain Ministry of Justice.

Hans Noot

President of the Gerard Noodt Foundation
Member of the board of the ICRLS

Dr. Gérard Ducrey

PhD in political sciences, Attorney at law, France

Eric Roux

Steering Committee of the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom

Dr. Alessandro Amicarelli

PhD, Attorney at law. LAW Society of England and Wales
Doctor of Research in International Order and Human Rights
"SAPIENZA" University of Rome

Jasvir Singh

United Sikhs International

Patricia Duval

Attorney at law, France
Specialist in European and international Human Rights laws



Recognize the Human Race as One



**European Coordination
for Freedom of Conscience**

Participant Organization of the EU Fundamental Rights Platform

EIFRF website for articles

EIFRF, in addition to its institutional website, has a website for articles where members are posting articles in every languages of Europe (<http://www.eifrf-articles.org>):

European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom-Articles



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Speech of Professor Marco Ventura at Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 23 April 2013

On 23 April 2013, Mr. Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands, member of PACE, EPP) co-sponsored an event with Lord Dundee (UK, member of PACE, EDG). The European Interreligious Forum...



Articles



Presentazione nella Biblioteca del Senato del libro "Credere è reato?"

Events - 04/27/2013

Giovedì 14 febbraio 2013, nella Sala Capitolare del Senato, a Roma, è stato presentato il libro "Credere è reato? Libertà religiosa nello stato laico e nella società aperta", volume curato dal prof. Luigi Berzano che raccoglie 23 saggi scritti da giuristi, filosofi, sociologi e giornalisti italiani....

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Press Release - Side event 23 April 2013 - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Events - 04/26/2013

Freedom of Conscience: Tensions between Church, State and Religious Minorities in Family Issues Side event 23 April 2013 - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Vital information on human rights standards provided for the Siles report on "Sectorial influence on Minors" On 23 April...

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Events - 04/25/2013

On 23 April 2013, Mr. Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands, member of PACE, EPP) co-sponsored an event with Lord Dundee (UK, member of PACE, EDG). The European Interreligious Forum for Religious Forum (EIFRF) helped to organise the event during the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council...

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Professors and religious leaders write to Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Religious Freedom - 04/17/2013

20 eminent professors and religious leaders from various countries of Europe wrote to Mr Alexander Chope, President of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in a common statement denouncing the willingness of a French deputy to...

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Conference Freedom of Conscience: the tensions between laicity and religious minorities in State/families issues

Events - 04/08/2013

Side event during the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Conference/side event Freedom of Conscience: the tensions between laicity and religious minorities in State/families

Issues Sponsored by: Pieter Omtzigt (EPP/CD) ...

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Nouveau livre : Réveil du religieux, éveil de la société

Books and publications - 04/07/2013

De ce que nous devons au réveil religieux, nous avons presque tout oublié : nos banques, nos hôpitaux, nos universités, notre sécurité sociale, l'idée même de la démocratie, tant et tant d'œuvres d'utilité publique... Quand Max Weber parlera de l'éthique protestante du capitalisme, il traduira avec...

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News

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New resolution on religious freedom adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
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EIFRF as a Cooperation Circle of United Religions Initiative (URI)



EIFRF, while being independent, is an official Cooperation Circle of United Religions Initiative (URI), approved by the global council of URI in August 2013.

The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. URI is a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world.

EIFRF, as Cooperation Circle of URI, shares the following purpose and principles:

Purpose

The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Principles

- The URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion.
- We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition.
- We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.
- We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.
- We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.
- We give and receive hospitality.
- We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.
- We practice equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.

- We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.
- We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.
- We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.
- We welcome as members all individuals, organizations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.
- We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.
- We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.
- We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.
- We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation.
- We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, Bylaws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.
- Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.

Contact :

**European Interreligious Forum
For Religious Freedom**

Eric Roux – Chair
41 Avenue de Saint Ouen
75017 Paris - France

+33 6 47 69 52 35
eiforumrf@gmail.com

