

FOREF Europe promoting FoRB rights at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016

HRWF (04.11.2016) - Since 2003, FOREF Europe, a secular non-confessional NGO based in Vienna, has regularly represented civil society at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. In their report this year (www.foref-europe.org), they have published a summary of

- the statements made by the introductory speakers at the working session on freedom of religion and belief (FoRB)
- their intervention on Hungary's controversial church law
- the phenomenon of government-sponsored NGOs, such as FECRIS

and some other issues.

Here are some excerpts of FOREF report.

About the OSCE/ ODIHR

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the world's largest regional security organization. With 57 participating states in North America, Europe and Asia some refer to the OSCE as "the little UN".

The beginning of the OSCE traces back to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the subsequent series of conferences known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The latter served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue between East and West during the Cold War and responded to new challenges arising in the post-Cold War period with the break-up of former Yugoslavia and the subsequent conflicts. Evolving beyond its original role the CSCE was renamed as the OSCE in 1994.

The OSCE serves as a forum for political dialogue that addresses security issues through (i) the politico-military, (ii) the economic and environmental, and (iii) the human dimensions, on the basis of political commitments among the participating States. The "human dimension" encompasses the advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, support for holding transparent and democratic elections, ensuring the rule of law and the protection of national minorities and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

The central OSCE institution committed to the human dimension is the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The largest annual human rights conference in the OSCE region is the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) hosted by the ODIHR. This conference provides a forum for dialogue between delegations of the 57 member states and representatives of civil society.

The total financial contributions by participating states to the OSCE amounts to 141,107,600 EUR according to the [Annual Report 2015](#). The biggest contributors are the USA (13,0%), Germany (11,0%), France, the United Kingdom and Italy (10,4% each). (The share given by the Russian Federation of 3,9% or 5,8 million EUR is comparably low.)

Exposing GONGOs at the OSCE: the case of FECRIS

At the HDIM civil society representatives receive an important chance to present their critique of bad government practices in front of 57 state delegations of the OSCE region.

However, an interesting phenomenon is the presence of so-called GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations) – NGOs that are fully financed by respective governments – shamelessly taking their seats in the civil society section. Such GONGOs are often being deployed by states characterized by legal frameworks that are institutionally restrictive against FoRB rights, i.e. Russia or France.

One such GONGO is FECRIS (European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism), a European umbrella organization that is completely financed by the French government and closely cooperates with representatives of the Russian-Orthodox church (cf. [the recent HDIM statement by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience](#)). Already in October 2013 FOREF Europe openly remarked on the state affiliation of FECRIS in a brief intervention at the HDIM setting and criticized its objective of exporting France's highly controversial and discriminatory anti-cult legislation to other countries in the OSCE region (see [Reply to the FECRIS Statement](#)). A highly acclaimed scientific study regarding the ideology, structure, activities and financing of FECRIS has been published by Gerhard Besier and Hubert Seiwert in 2012 (see [Freedom of Religion or Belief – Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIS](#)).

FECRIS representatives used to regularly read their statements in HDIM sessions on FoRB issues. However, in recent years FECRIS only submits their document to the OSCE online platform without presenting it during the civil society's speakers time. This year their statement was again crafted with highly abstract and pseudo-scientific terms such as "mind control process", but failed to articulate clear and operational recommendations based on OSCE commitments. Instead, Luigi Corvaglia, the president of the FECRIS subgroup CESAP, claims in his statement that FoRB rights are "used as a Trojan horse" to infiltrate democratic institutions. (See the FECRIS statement for the HDIM 2016 [here](#).)

Recently a [new documentary](#) has revealed the perfidious methods applied by FECRIS and how the anti-cult formation financially exploits naïve parents by promising them to "rescue" their child from the hands of a "cult". Alexander Dvorkin, FECRIS vice-president, and Alexander Neveev, a psychologist, masterminded an operation against 19-year old girl in Odessa/Ukraine. Yulia Yalovaya's mother paid 12,000 dollars to FECRIS in order to "liberate" her daughter from a job at an alternative newspaper. NGOs authentically representing civil society will not cease to expose the anti-cult narrative of FECRIS and how it abuses public funding for violating the fundamental freedoms of individuals and religious minority groups.