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Azerbaijan hosts 2014 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

Strasbourg. 28.08.2014 "Intercultural dialogue: interaction between culture and religion": in the framework of the [Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers](#), the 2014 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue will take place at the Hilton Baku Hotel, on 1-2 September 2014.

[Deputy Secretary General](#) Gabriella Battaini Dragoni will open the event together with Kamal Abdulla (State Adviser on multinational, multicultural and religious affairs), Mubariz Gurbanly (Chairman of the State Committee on religious associations), and Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh (Grand Mufti of the Caucasus). Rafael Huseynov, Rapporteur of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media on "Freedom of religion and religious practices", representative of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress will also be at the opening.

Azerbaijan has included the consolidation of culturally diverse societies based on mutual respect and understanding among the main priorities of its Chairmanship (14 May–13 November 2014), highlighting the role of intercultural dialogue to fight discrimination and intolerance in Europe.

The 7th edition of the Exchange envisages plenary sessions and three panels:

- 1) "Tolerance of religion and non-religious convictions in culturally diverse societies: a social capital";
- 2) "Contribution of religions and non-religious convictions to combating all forms of discrimination, intolerance and violence";
- 3) "The contribution of cultural heritage of a religious nature to intercultural dialogue and to the respect of the universal values defended by the Council of Europe".

The event will gather senior delegates of religious communities (Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Muslims), representatives of non-religious convictions, interreligious groups, NGOs, youth delegates, experts, academics, as well as mainstream media professionals and international organisations' officials.

Focus

Taking stock of Council of Europe action to promote freedom of religion, according to [Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#), the Exchange will focus on the interrelation between culture and religion on our continent.

Previous editions

The 2008 and 2009 Exchanges (in Strasbourg) dealt with "Teaching religious and convictional facts – A tool for acquiring knowledge about religions and beliefs in education". In 2010 (in Ohrid, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia") and 2011 (in Luxembourg City), the Exchange addressed the question of "The role of the media in fostering intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding: freedom of expression of the media and respect towards cultural and religious diversity". In 2012 (Durrës, Albania), the focus was on "Taking responsibility for tomorrow's Europe: the role of young people in the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue". In 2013 (Yerevan, Armenia), the highlight was on: "Freedom of religion in today's world: challenges and guarantees".

Background

The Council of Europe has pioneered closer unity and common understanding in Europe since the [European Cultural Convention](#) of 1954, celebrating this year its 60th anniversary. Increasing migration and globalisation have provided a stimulus for European societies to rethink the approach to cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. Since then, the term "intercultural dialogue" has found its way into more and more international conventions, recommendations and declarations.

In 2005, the 3rd Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw formally confirmed the mission of the Organisation to systematically encourage intercultural dialogue. In 2006, in the framework of the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the International Conference on "Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Co-operation", known as the "Volga Forum", established a regular mechanism for this dialogue. In 2007, in the context of its Chairmanship, San Marino set up the first European conference on "The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue".

In May 2008, the [White Paper](#) on intercultural dialogue "*Living together as equals in dignity*", highlighted the contribution of both religious and secular groups to European cultural heritage; and it is today widely recognised as the reference document on managing diversity in a democratic way.

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