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Armenia hosts 2013 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

Strasbourg, 28.08.2013 – “Freedom of religion in today’s world: challenges and guarantees”: in the framework of the [Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers](#), the 2013 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue will take place at the *Government Guest House*, in Yerevan, on 2-3 September 2013.

Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, will open the event with His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

The Republic of Armenia has included the promotion of European values through intercultural dialogue among the main priorities of its Chairmanship (16 May – 14 November 2013), with a view to stepping up action in combating intolerance and promoting freedom of religion, according to Article 9 of the [Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#).

The 6th edition of the Exchange envisages plenary sessions and three panels:

- 1) “Freedom of religion, conscience and thought as a fundamental right in contemporary societies”;
- 2) “Protection of persons belonging to religious minorities, believers and non-believers and their contribution to the fight against intolerance, discrimination and hate speech with regard to freedom of religion”;
- 3) “Avenues for future action within and beyond Europe: youth education and awareness-raising on religion and beliefs, dialogue and co-operation among and with religious and non-religious representatives”.

The event will gather delegates of religious communities and non-religious convictions, mainstream media professionals as well as experts, academics and representatives of international organisations and NGOs.

Background

The history of Europe (from *cuius regio eius religio* to nowadays) is closely linked to the evolution of trends in matters of religious beliefs. At all times and at different respects, the religious dimension has raised important questions in the social context and for general policy in all countries.

The Council of Europe has pioneered for closer unity and common understanding in Europe, in particular through the [European Cultural Convention](#) signed in 1954. Increasing migration and the redrawing of national boundaries, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, have been 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 conventions, recommendations and declarations in the international community.

In 2005, the [Third Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe](#) in Warsaw confirmed the mission of the Organisation to foster intercultural dialogue, based on universal human rights. In 2006, in the framework of the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, an International Conference on “Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Co-operation”, known as the “Volga Forum”, appealed for a regular dialogue on the issues of human rights, social cohesion and cultural diversity. In 2007, in the context of the succeeding Chairmanship, San Marino launched 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 the European cultural heritage; and it is today widely recognised as the reference document on managing diversity in a democratic way.

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 main theme launched the debate on "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".

Interesting fact

The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church is the world's oldest national church and an early centre of Christianity, tracing its origins to the missions of Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus during the 1st century. Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion in AD 301.

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