



Speech by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
International Kolping Society
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Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

With this 30th Seminar of the International Kolpingwerk Society, we are entering into a period of very important anniversaries, namely the 60th Anniversary of the Council of Europe and the 50th Anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights.

This year also marks the 35th anniversary of the status of the International Kolpingswerk Society as a participating non-governmental organisation with the Council of Europe.

I certainly did not want to miss the opportunity to welcome you to the Palais de l'Europe and to thank you for your interest in the work of the Council of Europe and the very valuable work of your Society in promoting our common values.

The close and genuine relationship between the Council of Europe and civil society is longstanding. We value your contribution in every area of our work, but I should like to single out one priority in which

non-governmental contribution is absolutely essential, namely intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. It is clear that such dialogue cannot only be encouraged through governmental policies and imposed from above. It is difficult to legislate dialogue, it needs to be nurtured and built at grass-root level. The role of public institutions is to, when appropriate, create the necessary circumstances and facilitate such dialogue.

The Council of Europe work on intercultural dialogue has a long tradition. In a sense, virtually everything we do is meant to facilitate mutual respect, knowledge and tolerance within our societies, which is the ultimate objective of inter-cultural dialogue. This work has been intensified in recent years against the background of increased terrorist threat and the negative effect it has had on relations between different communities in different parts of the world. And that goes also for the religious communities: only a few days ago, I opened, together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of San Marino, Minister Stolfi, an exchange of views on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue in which representatives of many religious communities participated and had a very active and interesting debate.

Our work goes in parallel with the initiative of the United Nations, and in particular of the Alliance of Civilizations, in which we also actively participate.

But the work done on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue here at the Council of Europe has a very important specificity, which also guides

our contribution to similar initiatives in other fora – namely that it is firmly anchored in the European Convention on Human Rights.

We consider that the values protected by the Convention are not only European, but universal, what is specific to Europe, perhaps, is that we have achieved the most elaborated and legally binding international mechanism to uphold and promote these values, and this is an achievement which we are determined to protect;

In other words, the values and the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights set the framework within which dialogue is taking place. There can clearly be no question of accepting any form of relativism in the name of cultures and traditions.

This being said, the insistence on human rights and fundamental freedoms leaves ample space to learn about and to reconcile different views on some very important issues in our societies, through dialogue, education and most of all, mutual respect.

You, at the International Kolpingswerk Society, together with your colleagues in other non-governmental organisations, can make an important contribution to this common endeavour. And we count on you.

I should like to thank you once again for being here and I wish you a very interesting and productive seminar.

Thank you very much.