

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

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**DECLARATION OF "KOLPING INTERNATIONAL"
ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S
COMMITMENT TO THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION
(Declaration of the Council of Europe 2010 of Lamego/Portugal)**

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL observes with concern nationalistic developments in some member countries of the Council of Europe. Since the end of World War II KOLPING INTERNATIONAL has always been committed to European integration and in particular actively supported the work of the Council of Europe. In the light of the decreasing support of people into democratic structures in some countries and also facing fundamental questions about securing the Human Rights, such as in the religious field, the work of the Council of Europe gains new actuality.

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL AS NGO OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- reminds of the "Declaration on Four Fundamental Freedoms" given by the American President Franklin Roosevelt nearly 70 years ago (6th January, 1941), that explicitly mentions religious freedom.
- underlines, that this declaration of the President at that time has been of formative influence to later basic texts concerning the protection of the Human Rights, mainly to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" passed in December 1948 and indirectly to the European Convention of Human Rights of the European Council (ECHR) in December 1950.
- refers to art. 9 of the ECHR, that provides religious freedom
- welcomes that the European Court of Law for Human Rights has specified the scope of article 9 of the ECHR in several basic decisions since the early nineties
- repeats its regret given in the Declaration of the Council of Europe 2008 in Brno, that religious freedom has not yet been realised in all 47 states of the Council of Europe
- welcomes, that the Council of Europe holds annual conferences on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue
- appreciates that the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly regularly provided its tribune to church leaders and also, that citizens and religious NGOs that hold participative status at the Council of Europe can participate in events concerning the Freedom of Religion
- thanks the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for taking stand on all basic questions concerning religion and the churches in many debates since the middle of the 1960s

- underlines the special competence of the churches and the religious communities to strengthen peace, to support co-operation, tolerance and solidarity within the society as well as supporting the European institutions in implementing European core values
- remarks, that during the last decades the western societies have considerably changed concerning their socio-cultural element and reinforced the secularization and individualisation
- in this context underlines that the accelerated globalization transforms local habits, it leads to a coexistence of people coming from countries far away, speaking different languages, partly having different customs, lifestyles and ideologies and now belonging to new social networks
- supports the activities of the Council of Europe concerning religious freedom, and the support of interreligious dialogue and thus makes the following suggestions and comments:

I. General

1. points out that religious communities have the right to file a complain with the European Court of Law for Human Rights when their rights according to the ECHR and under assumption of this convention are violated.

II. Measures concerning the status and to support the role of the churches

2. reminds, that this circle of questions has been subject to a topical monitoring of the committee of ministers of the Council of Europe in the years 2002 and 2003.
3. reminds as well that different bodies of the Council of Europe have addressed the changing situation of the churches in Middle and Eastern Europe after 1989.
4. invites the European governments to
 - a. ensure harmonic relations between churches and states or to reinstall them solely because this is the only way how religious freedom can be realised.
 - b. to grant every church and religious community legal status when their activities comply with European standards and to give them an appropriate support.
 - c. to respect and protect the autonomy of the churches and religious communities, that is essential for the pluralism in democratic societies (for example no interference in the organisation of the Church, the Canon Law as well as in dogmatic questions).
 - d. to support the churches and denominations in clearing questions of ownership structures.

III. Measures to support interreligious dialogue

5. recognizes that the Parliamentarian Assembly of the Council of Europe has called up for more interaction between the religions in several reports and debates (for example the contribution of the Jews into European culture, the contribution of the Islamic tradition into European culture).
6. remarks that the meeting 2010 of the Council of Europe concerning the religious dimension of the intercultural dialogue is being held in Ohrid on 13th and 14th September. The topic of the meeting is: "The role of the media in supporting the intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding: Freedom of opinion in the media and the respect for cultural and religious plurality". Next to media representatives, participants of religious and non-confessional communities are expected and
 - a. hopes, that new important impulses go out from this meeting, since a constant dialogue, sense of responsibility and sustainable efforts of all confessions contribute into a peaceful and enhanced society,

- b. invites the Council of Europe to intensify its intercultural dialogue concerning its activities and to particularly institutionalise the annual meetings and to give them their own structure.
7. points out that the ECHR has emphasized above all the tolerance and the respect for religious pluralism and the neutrality of the state towards religious communities in its decisions.
8. refers to three relevant decisions of the ECHR in the year 2009 concerning religious freedom:
 - the case *Mirolubovs et. al. versus Latvia* because of interference in ecclesiastic arguments;
 - the case *Bayatyan versus Armenia* because of conscientious objection;
 - the case *Lautsi versus Italy* because of the installation of a crucifix in a classroom.
9. underlines the special interest in the *Lautsi* case, that has been referred to the Great Chamber of the European Court for final assessment and decision;
 - a. gives cause for concern, that in some European countries religious symbols are signs of national identity and thus there is a common consensus. In other countries it is pointed out, that the installation of religious symbols is an outflow of historic and cultural imprint as well as traditional value. It is hence difficult to find a solution fitting for all countries.
 - b. would welcome if the Great Chamber of the ECHR could find a compromise that would enable the installation of religious symbols in public in general on the one hand, and would respect the concerns and emotions of people not belonging to any religious community.
 - c. is aware that the treatment of questions concerning religious symbols is not to be left out to the governments, authorities and courts alone but in special way has to be given to the democratic and parliamentary powers in the single states that can estimate the meaning of religious symbols especially in public due to their national history. It all comes down on how we can reach a togetherness imprinted with tolerance and respect in a pluralistic society.

Cologne / Lamego, 19th September 2010

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KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

In 1849 the Catholic priest **Adolph Kolping** founded an association in Cologne for single journeymen in order to give them some help in solving their problems caused by the industrial revolution and being summarized with the term „**social question**“.

At the beginning it was a small association, but meanwhile it has developed to a world-wide society that counts today about 6,000 regional groups and 470,000 members in **61 countries**. In spite of the enormous growth and the changed situation in society the Kolping Society has remained true to its original task and is still working towards the solution of the social question. However, this work is not only limited to the national level, it also includes the international level.

The Kolping Society sees itself as a **Catholic social organization**. It supports its members in a special way in developing their personal talents, it offers help to its members and society as a whole and it promotes the common good in the Christian sense with the activities of its members and groups.

The work of the Kolping Society is aimed at the integral individual, who is not only offered help and stimulation in all aspects of life, but also provided with an opportunity to share his problems and also his knowledge and skills. It is the close interconnection and interrelation of the individual spheres of life, which is the starting-point and the ground for the comprehensive work of the Kolping Society and its service towards the integral development of the individual.

According to this approach the work of the Kolping Society concentrates on the following aspects: **work and profession, marriage and family, society and state, culture and leisure time**.

The Kolping Society is a democratically structured organization, and therefore it feels responsible for the promotion of democracy, too. It also fights for the special human dignity in any phase of life and for the inalienable and inviolable human rights.

The Kolping Society in Europe feels in a special way obliged to the European idea – owing to its historical development and its programme – and co-operates intensively with the **Council of Europe** and the **European Union** or the **European Parliament**. Since 1974 it has held the „**Consultative Status at the Council of Europe**“ in Strasbourg as NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

A special sign of this intensive co-operation are the European seminars realized annually for 30 years (1979) in Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe).

Owing to its world-wide commitment it has furthermore the „**Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations**“ and was admitted to the „**Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations of the International Labour Office (ILO)**“.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in **1989** the International Kolping Society saw an important task in contributing to **develop a civil society** in the formerly communist states, and it did so by building up independent National Organizations. Meanwhile active organizational structures have developed in many Central and East European countries, like for example Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Albania etc.. These Kolping Societies have picked up important fields of activity like youth and family work, general and professional training, promotion of small enterprises and social work, but also socio-political education, and they have also undertaken urgent social tasks in self-responsibility.

Although the Kolping Society was founded in Europe and has still kept its international head-quarters in Cologne, it has extended its fields of activity all over the whole world in the meantime. The **promotion of the international co-operation** and solidarity is a central and important task, and the International Kolping Society contributes with its work to solve the international social question.

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