

[http://assembly.coe.int/President/Cavusoglu/Discours/2010/20100913\\_Exchange%20on%20the%20religious.htm](http://assembly.coe.int/President/Cavusoglu/Discours/2010/20100913_Exchange%20on%20the%20religious.htm)

**Address by the President of the PACE, Mevlut Cavusoglu,**

**at the 2010 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of multicultural dialogue**

**(Ohrid, 13-14 September 2010)**

Dear Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to represent the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly at the European Exchange on the religious dimension of multicultural dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue is one of the prime topics for the Assembly, which itself is an emanation of Europe's cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. It is a subject to which I have a deep personal attachment, and it is one of the priorities for my term as President of the Assembly.

The theme chosen for this Exchange impinges on a complex and manifold range of problems.

Our European societies are undergoing an ever more marked phenomenon of intermingling of populations, beliefs and cultures. This diversity which, in the parliamentary Assembly's view, is to be experienced as a source of enrichment and vitality, is also becoming a source of anxieties and fears, and generates tensions.

We are thus confronted with problems of incomprehension and with proliferating outbreaks of intolerance, even of rejection and violence, which shatter social cohesion.

Moreover, in the framework of the global information society, every event and every message quickly reaches all regions of the world. Depending on the place, the interpretation of news broadcast by the media is made according to a set of values, a history, traditions and different religious convictions and cultures.

We need to appreciate that there are diverse sensitivities which come together and inter-relate with each other. Not merely cohabitation of different religions and cultures in our states and in Europe is at stake; so is the co-existence of our societies with those of the world at large.

In this context, the media hold a strategic position. We are well aware that they are far more than a plain vector of information. They are crucially important in the process of forming personal opinions and of shaping the dominant patterns of social behaviour. In addition, the glance cast by the media on events and life in society tends to solidify and to become the perception of society.

That is why the major concern which we must further is to ensure that the media perform a role of mediation and thus help create an environment conducive to better understanding of the various religious beliefs and cultural approaches. To do so, we must succeed in collectively taking up a threefold challenge.

It should firstly be ensured that the media as a whole constitute an area of information, not of manipulation. Although absolute impartiality is not possible, there absolutely must be genuine plurality of the media that helps decode information according to different outlooks and is capable of reflecting society's diversity. Likewise, it is indispensable that there be transparency as to the financial oversight of the media, that the independence of journalists be safeguarded, and that offences against the freedom of the press be firmly condemned.

Secondly, the media should retain the capability to provide an area of freedom, open and without discrimination, for different sensitivities and opinions.

It is imperative to preserve the tenuous balance between freedom of expression - a fundamental value of every democratic society - and respect for convictions - a formative element of personal identity. In speaking of convictions, I mean not only religions but also convictions of those who reject all religions. We respect all of them and their rights.

Where to locate the point of balance between the two freedoms is a question still being debated. The case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, while setting benchmarks, rightly leaves room for the discretion of states. Nonetheless, as I think everyone can agree, this balance is underpinned essentially by responsible exercise of the freedoms in question.

Thirdly, the media should offer themselves as an area of dialogue where the encounter of different convictions is ordered not by antagonism but by a constructive approach aiming to foster understanding, recognition and mutual respect in a plural society.

Dialogue between cultures is to be founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as on a common resolve to break down divisions, optimise what brings us together, and work together to consolidate respect for the fundamental values that we share. Otherwise there is not a true dialogue.

This is no doubt an ambitious programme, as I realise. It nonetheless behoves us to carry it out together, and I am sure that this Exchange will help us identify the right paths of reflection.