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Speech by
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The governments in all democratic countries, and in this respect all the member countries of the Council of Europe, in their ordinary law or the supreme law embodied in the Constitution, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, that is the spiritual rights of the person, are safeguarded. *Article 18* of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus makes specific provision for those rights, which are pronounced in a more lucid and coherent language than the corresponding provision in *Article 9* of the Convention for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. *Article 18* safeguards the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It declares all open religions to be free and equal before the law and gives the right to every person to profess his faith and exercise his worship either alone or collectively. No physical or moral force can be exerted on anybody for the purpose of making him change or not change his faith.

All the above principles have now become in all democratic countries self evident axioms, not of course through a friendly dialogue but by bloodshed, trial and error. The peoples' dream and high expectations are that these ideals are adhered to by State authorities and Church leaders. The authority and power of the Church in all democratic countries is separated from the State's power. This separation, to my humble opinion, may prove useful and necessary if it is not seen as a source of difference but as a basis for mutual collaboration on two separate aspects of human life. The Church cares for the inner spiritual beliefs of the person, his soul, whilst civil authorities for his well being within the society. Religious teaching is validly expected to foster peaceful coexistence and mutual respect regardless of the various doctrines adhered to by different ethnic groups. Church leaders, I believe in all humility, must vehemently oppose the sinister use of religious beliefs by politicians in their aim to promote ethnic, geopolitical, strategic, or economic interests of their countries, thus stirring upheaval and hatred against fellow citizens or peoples in other countries. If religious beliefs are used by governments to promote sheer political aims, then all spiritual aspect in life is defeated and the people will turn into a hating mob instead of a civilized and tolerant society, respecting the rights and liberties of everyone.

Cyprus has been an excellent example of a country where different religions coexist in harmony; that is the two main religions the Christian Greek Orthodox and Moslem professed by the Turkish Cypriots, Armenian, Latin and Maronite. Religious festivities were an occasion for everybody, regardless of faith, to participate and enjoy, congratulating for the religious day and wishing good health and happiness to fellow citizens. In wedding parties, Greek and Turkish Cypriots were enjoying the occasion for 2-3 nights. They even attended the religious ceremonies in the church or mosque. When I was a little child I vividly remember my grandmother taking me to a luna-park fair, organized for the “Bayram” festivities near the Kyrenia Gate in Nicosia. Furthermore no offence or provocation is felt, on the contrary it is a common and respected sight, for everyone to see Moslem ladies covered in their veils and the Greek Orthodox clergy in their traditional black gowns.

It is indeed with sorrow and disappointment that we feel that since the Turkish invasion of our country in 1974, religion is used as a tool for segregating people both socially and geographically. Differences in religion, language and ethnicity instead of forming the basis for coexistence are

politically used to partition Cyprus geographically, thus separating the two communities socially, culturally and economically. Cyprus is a member of the European Union. The Treaty provides in its Preamble that the member States will strive to safeguard liberty, democracy, safety and the rule of law in all member States. What has happened in our country, a tragedy which still continues, flagrantly violates all the principles embodied in the United Nations Charter, the Convention for Human Rights and Liberties and the E.U. Treaty. I feel, with all respect, that churches must prove that they are not a subordinate body to those exercising political power, but an independent spiritual community embracing all people and caring for their well being. The clergy in all countries is expected to play its true and genuine role.

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