



Event at the 70th International Day of Human Rights “Are Human Rights in Europe in Peril?”

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By Barbara Grabner

During the last 70 years, Europe has become a key player in the promotion of human rights internationally. But various pressures increasingly dilute the original value system. Recently, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg legitimized the Islamic blasphemy code in the interests of preserving religious peace. That set the frame for the recent event focusing on Islam and the Cairo Declaration and other perilous goings-on.

On December 10, 2018 honoring the 70th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights UPF organized the presentation “Are Human Rights in Europe in peril?” The event was co-hosted by the think-tank Futurological Society of Slovakia and the Association of Slovak Scientific and Technological Societies. The location was a conference hall at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in downtown Bratislava. The up-to-date topic attracted many guests and soon the room was overcrowded. The welcoming address was given by MP Lubos Blaha, a known Marxist

philosopher working at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Since he is also the chairperson of a Slovak delegation at the Council of Europe, Blaha spoke about challenges in multicultural societies.

The guest speaker was Peter Zoehrer, Secretary General of the Forum for Religious Freedom Europe in Vienna. In his vivid presentation he outlined what the Cairo Declaration is and how it differs from UN Human Rights Declaration - especially that there is no freedom to leave or change religions, it justifies the superiority of Muslim men and the discrimination against women and non-Muslims. “Recent cases indicate that our courts’ approach to defamation resembles that found in Islamic societies. But in civilized society it should be possible to discuss any religious doctrine and practice without fear”, he said.

Peter Zoehrer addressed also other challenges to human rights in Europe like to preserve freedom of expression and press freedom against the increasing pressure of some governments as well as the difficulties to discern “free speech” from “hate speech”. He emphasized, that “there is

no human right that says we are not to be offended.” Another concern is that the European Union is demanding Human Rights standards which it fails to implement within its own borders. “Increasingly national authorities curtail the right to free speech if such speech is deemed to be offensive to some group. They implement restrictions allowing human rights to be abused for the sake of political agendas.” Zoehrer also outlined how nations with a dominant religion tend to curtail the rights of religious minority, as it is most alarmingly executed by Putin in Russia.

At the end a lively and long Q&A session started, moderated by UPF Secretary General Milos Klas. After 2,5 hours still not all questions could be answered. Many guests (over 50) expressed their appreciation of the high quality of the lecture and discussion.

Overview on the freedom advocacy of the Forum for Religious Freedom Europe:

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