

UPF Bratislava, Slovakia Asks: Are European Human Rights in Peril?

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Bratislava, Slovakia -- Honoring the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UPF organized a program titled "Are Human Rights in Europe in Peril?"

The event on December 10, 2018, 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 central Bratislava. The timely 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. As he is also the chair of a Slovak delegation at the Council of Europe, he spoke about challenges in multicultural societies.

The guest speaker was Peter Zoehrer, secretary general of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) Europe, located in Vienna. In his vivid presentation he outlined what the Cairo Declaration is and how it differs from the Universal Human Rights Declaration -- especially that under the Cairo Declaration there is no freedom to leave or change religions and that 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.

Mr. Zoehrer also addressed other challenges to human rights in Europe, such as preserving freedom of expression and press freedom against the increasing pressure of some governments as well as the difficulty 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," Mr. Zoehrer said. He also outlined how nations with a dominant religion tend to curtail the rights of religious minorities, as has been seen in Russia.

At the end a lively and long question-and-answer session took place, moderated by UPF-Slovakia Secretary General Milos Klas. After 2.5 hours still not all the questions had been answered. Many of the more than 50 guests expressed their appreciation of the high quality of the lecture and discussion.