

# X. Annual HUMAN FORUM

On the subject of

***Strengthening Democracy and Civil Society  
as the Prevention of the Growth of Extremism***

**International Forum on Democracy and Human Rights**

Under the auspices of:

President of Slovak Republic **H.E. Zuzana Čaputová**

Rector of Matej Bel University **Vladimír Hiadlovský**

Dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations **Branislav Kováčik**

Head of Banská Bystrica Region **Ondrej Lunter**

Mayor of Banská Bystrica **Ján Nosko**

**Date: 2023, November 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday – Thursday)**

**Place of venue:** Banská Bystrica  
Historical Town Hall  
Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations UMB  
The State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica  
ZÁHRADA – Cultural Centre  
Evangelical Church in Banská Bystrica

**Organisers:** Civic platform NOT IN OUR TOWN  
Institute for Democracy at UMB

**in collaboration**

Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations UMB  
The Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Development of the Civil Society  
Centre for Community Organizing  
ZÁHRADA Cultural Centre

**with support of**

Banská Bystrica Regional Government  
The City of Banská Bystrica  
Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica  
The State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica  
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

On November 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> 2023, Banská Bystrica will host the tenth edition of the human rights forum "HUMAN FORUM - Democracy in Danger?", initiated by the civic platform NOT IN OUR TOWN in Banská Bystrica.

The previous year (HUMAN FORUM 2022) was focused on supporting democracy from below, on discussions on the importance of strengthening local democracies, i.e. on building local communities that will be resistant to manifestations of radicalization, extremism, nationalism, racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia, homophobia and other manifestations of intolerance and even hatred, in the geopolitical situation of Russian aggressive war against the sovereign state of Ukraine.

The theme of local democratic communities is proving crucial. Without democracy from below, it is impossible to build a strong, sustainable, and resilient democratic society as a whole. This time, the forum is a continuation of the previous year but also builds on the civil society meetings of the so-called "mini HUMAN FORUM", which were held throughout this year in different regions of Slovakia, from the East to the West.

This year, we will specifically focus on the potential for cooperation in the development of civil society and democracy in Ukraine, both during the war and in the post-war period. Slovakia and the European Union need a neighbouring Ukraine with a stable democracy and a strong civil society.

Civil society, which is based on the principles of creating tolerant local communities can mitigate the effects of the political conflict, that is evident not only in Slovakia but also in many countries of the European Union, the United Kingdom or the United States of America. Reflecting on these global social trends, we have decided to bring together people and organizations that play a significant role in building healthy democratic local communities through the HUMAN FORUM event. The adoption of the Concept of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights in the World, has also provided these efforts with the appropriate conceptual and strategic framework for strengthening the value-based foreign policy of the Slovak Republic and to consolidate the position of the Slovak Republic as a responsible member of the European Union and the international community. The tenth anniversary of HUMAN FORUM will provide a space for interactive discussions with partners from international organisations and institutions, representatives of government, parliament, civil society, academia and the private business sector on the use of the potential of such a broad partnership.

The purpose of the conference is to use the potential of civic society and the business sector as key partners in the implementation of the priorities and objectives of value-based foreign policy. We also share an interest in contributing to the discussion within the European Union and the Summit for Democracy, and thus generating incentives for the implementation of priorities in the field of support for human rights and democracy at home and abroad.

HUMAN FORUM events have never been and is not to offer ready-made answers to the questions raised. Our ambition is to provide a space for expressing the opinions and arguments of different groups in society, for their involvement in a debate about how our society should look like, and what we, as citizens, can do about it. As usual, we will not neglect the topics of education and activities for schools. We will also discuss how and whether we are sufficiently educating and raising the younger generation to civic responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others.

NOT IN OUR TOWN, which is the main organizer of the HUMAN FORUM event, has decried the need for mutual tolerance and understanding between races, nations and different faiths since the beginning of its existence. That is why, in cooperation with Catholic, Evangelical and other churches in Banská Bystrica, we are preparing an ecumenical worship service for the sixth time.

### **The purpose of the forum is to:**

- deepen awareness of the fundamental values in a democratic society,
- call for respect and reverence of human rights,
- highlight shortcomings and negative social phenomena such as intolerance and extremism,
- seek tools to address these issues, including both prevention and deradicalization,
- contribute to spreading tolerance in society.

## HUMAN FORUM 2023 Programme

**TUESDAY, November 28<sup>th</sup> - 2023**

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9:00 – 10:00 (Historical Town Hall – foyer)

### **Registration**

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10:00 – 12:00 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

### **Opening of the conference**

#### ➤ **Political and civil responsibility for recent trends and developments in human rights: Europe and the world**

Tea Jaliashvili – ODIHR First Deputy Director

#### ➤ **Opportunities for cooperation between Slovakia and post-war Ukraine: Ukraine's needs in the field of development of democracy and respect for human rights**

### **Panel discussion**

The guests will meet in panel discussion on a topic that significantly exceeds the borders of Slovakia and affects the entire world. Whether European states will uphold high standards of democracy or witness a decline in democratic norms will also influence the rest of the world. It can be said that several countries are fighting for their democratic future, but many of them still have the tools of democracy at their disposal. Ukraine's fight for the character of its country in a war, is the ultimate and fatal instrument for the fight for freedom, independence, and democracy. How Slovakia, as one of the neighbouring countries, will respond to the situation in Ukraine and how it will do so in the future, will be discussed by the top representatives of our country with foreign guests of the conference.

- **Tea Jaliashvili** – ODIHR First Deputy Director
- **Alexander Duleba** – Senior Research Associate at the Research Centre of the Slovak Society for Foreign Policy
- **Martin Kahanec** – Director of the Shattuck Center for Human Rights, Central European University (CEU) in Vienna

Moderator: **Dagmar Kusá** - Vice President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia.

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*12.00 – 13.00 lunch break*

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13.00 – 14.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

## Panel discussion

### ➤ **The role of democratic countries in the development of civil society in Ukraine**

Ukraine, which is currently struggling for freedom of its country and to maintain peace throughout Europe, will need an active, strong, tolerant, respectful, discerning, and fair-minded civil society in order to set up a post-war democratic order. What was the state of Ukraine's civil society before the war, what role is it playing during, and what challenges will it face after the war? How can Slovakia, as a neighbouring country, be helpful in the process of building civil society in Ukraine? What forms of cooperation are already taking place between Slovak and Ukrainian civil society?

- **Michal Klembara** – Cultural Center Malý Berlín
- **Ruslan Zhylenko** – Uzhhorod National University, Director of the Carpathian Foundation in Ukraine
- **Svitlana Pugach** – Director for Strategic Partnerships, Tabletochki Charitable Foundation Kyiv (online)
- **Fedor Blaščák** – Open Society Foundation Slovakia

Moderator: **Laura Dittel** – Director of the Carpathian Foundation in Slovak Republic

*14.30 – 15.00 coffee break*

15.00 – 16.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

### ➤ **Speech by H.E. Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Slovak Republic**

## Panel discussion

### ➤ **The role of an active civil society in democracy and the potential consequences of its weakening**

We consider an active civil society to be one of the conditions of a good democracy. It is as legitimate and important part of the political system as the existence of political parties, elections, the system of representative democracy, or the existence of institutions that ensure rule-of-law. This panel aims to reflect on the evolution of the state of civil society in the international context. What role does active civil society play in the Western Europe, post-communist Europe, and wartime Europe? What challenges do international, national, and local institutions and organizations face in order not to undermine the active participation of civil society on the quality of democracy?

- **Silvia Porubánová** – Director of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
- **Bálint Farkas** – Ökotárs Foundation, Hungary
- **Filip Vagač** – Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, Slovak Republic
- **Csilla Droppová** – Civic Initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN and HUMAN FORUM Coordinator

Moderator: **Alexandra Bitušíková** – Matej Bel University and Civic Initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN

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16.30 – 17.00 coffee break

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17.00 – 18.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

## **Gala evening**

### ➤ **The tenth anniversary of the international event HUMAN FORUM 2023 and ten years of the civic initiative Not in Our Town**

The multi-genre event HUMAN FORUM is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. A decade ago, it emerged in response to the election of an extremist party to the position of regional chairman in the local government. HUMAN FORUM created a communication and networking platform to counter the trends in society that indicated the growing popularity of extremist views and the popularity of political parties and initiatives with anti-democratic narratives that restrict human rights and freedoms. In this session, we will recall on the activities undertaken over the past 10 years, which have now become an integral part of an active civil society, not only in the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region but also beyond. We will welcome all laureates of the HUMAN FORUM Award. Additionally, we will present the plans and objectives of the civic initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN for the years to come in the field of the development of democracy and the protection of human rights. Our ambition is to inspire other communities in Slovakia, as well as in Ukraine and other countries.

### ➤ **HUMAN FORUM Award ceremony**

Presented by: Csilla Droppová and Alexandra Bitušíková – civic initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN

### ➤ **Opening of the Exhibition “Is Democracy in Danger?”**

Curator: Gabriela Bírošová - Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica

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18.30 – 20.00 reception

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20.00 – 21.00 (Evangelic Church)

### ➤ **Ecumenical service**

**Evangelical Church, Lazovná Street in Banská Bystrica**

with the participation of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Greek Catholic Church, the Church of the Brethren, the Baptist Unity Fraternity, the Jewish community, the Islamic community and others.

Speech by preacher **Daniel Pastirčák**

## WEDNESDAY, November 29<sup>th</sup> - 2023

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9:30 – 10:00 (auditorium FPSaIR, UMB)

### Keynote speech

Erik Jones - Director of the Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute (EUI) in Florence

10:00 – 11.30 (auditorium FPSaIR, UMB)

### Presentation and panel discussion

#### ➤ **AI and its impact on democracy**

Online environment, social networks, artificial intelligence, chatbots... All of them characterise the technological development and progress of our current era. Are these innovations a threat to democracy? Will humanism clash with technology?

- **Vladimír Šucha** – Head of the European Commission Representation in Slovakia (Introductory presentation)

#### Panellists:

- **Vladimír Šucha** – Head of the European Commission Representation in Slovakia
- **Tomáš Kriššák** – Gerulata Technologies
- **Erik Jones** - Director of the Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute (EUI) in Florence

Moderator: **Jozef Michal Mintal** – Institute for Democracy at UMB

Negotiating language: English

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11.30 – 12.00 coffee break

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12.00 – 13.00 (FPSaIR, UMB)

### Discussion in sessions

*The discussions in sessions take on nature of a roundtable meetings, intended to foster potential cooperation on various topics among representatives of institutions, relevant NGOs, and representatives of the academic community, including students. We need to create new partnerships and strengthen existing ones to ensure the synergistic effect of such collaborations can yield real results for society. The Institute for Democracy at UMB will coordinate these discussions in cooperation with other organisations.*

#### **1) Radicalisation online and offline: Two separate worlds?**

We live in a fast-paced and dynamic era, divided between the virtual and the real world. However, both are threatened by polarisation, disinformation, and hoaxes in the form of conversations, campaigns, or rallies that further radicalise individuals and the masses. Is the online and offline environment truly so different? And if so, what can (and should) we proactively do to bridge these two worlds?

Moderator: **Maroš Chmelík** – Centre for Community Organizing

## **2) The potential for cooperation in combating corruption, enhancing public control, and fostering civil society in Ukraine**

Several civil organisations in Slovakia already cooperate with partners in Ukraine. Projects aimed at building strong neighbourly relations are laying the groundwork for better mutual understanding and support, just as it should be among good neighbours. What kind of cooperation is possible to engage in, what is planned, and what are the preconditions established for such collaborations? We will discuss together during this roundtable, in the presence of current and potential partners dedicated to support the development of democracy and civil society in Ukraine.

Moderator: **Róbert Vancel** – Institute for Democracy at UMB

## **3) Proactive civic initiatives in the regions and how to finance them**

After 30 years of independence of Slovakia, it is becoming more and more evident that we have neglected the development of a strong civil society. Currently, we lack vibrant, active civic communities, mainly in the regions, which would be able to perform an outreach, or control function towards the institutions and various public organizations in crucial moments. In the same manner, we have not created any systematic funding for the development of civic society during the 30 years of Slovakia's independence. Project funding with limited timeframes will never replace long-term and continuous financial streams that can provide continuous institutional support to civil society. We will seek solutions on how to move forward in this area, how to achieve the existence of a strong civil society protecting democracy and minority rights with experts from NGOs, as well as with representatives of relevant institutions and representatives of the business sector.

Moderator: **Lucia Pašková** – BYSTRINY contributor and founder of CURAPROX comp.

## **4) Action Plan of the Agents of Co-Existence and Open Government in Banská Bystrica or what can we do to eliminate polarization in our city?**

As in other cities in Slovakia, Banská Bystrica is also facing polarisation. The Banská Bystrica Open Government Initiative, whose mission is to bring innovation in open governance and build a culture of dialogue, is currently developing its second action plan. It is being implemented with the support of the project "Agents of Co-existence" and "Ambassadors for Creating Good Relations", in which the city is currently involved. One of the commitments of the action plan is focused on the topic of depolarisation. What specific activities can we do in this field as local government and civil society? Who are the other ambassadors of good relations, who can help us with depolarisation in this city? We will look for answers in our workshop.

Moderators: **Soňa Karíková** and **Antónia Jurečková** – Banská Bystrica Municipal Office

14.00 – 15.30 (auditorium P4, FPSaIR, UMB)

## Roundtable discussion

### ➤ **“Summit for Democracy and Open Government Partnership “**

Roundtable discussion with representatives of civil society organisations on the fulfilment of the Slovak Republic's commitments to the Summit for Democracy and the Open Government Partnership with the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and representatives of key ministries and institutions.

Moderator: **Juraj Rizman** – Post Bellum

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*Transfer to ZÁHRADA – Cultural Centre*

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16.00 – 17.30 (ZÁHRADA, Cultural Centre)

## Public discussion

### ➤ **Reflection on National Elections - What did the election results reveal about the state of democracy in Slovakia?**

Two months after the parliamentary elections, analysts, political scientists, and sociologists will assess what these elections have shown us in relation to the potential development of human rights, democracy, and civil society. Can we assess from election results to what extent democratic standards and human rights will be upheld in our country? What do Slovak voters prefer, and whom are they choosing as their representatives and leaders? What will be our relationship towards the ongoing war in Ukraine?

- **Grigorij Mesežnikov** – Political Scientist
- **Kamila Borseková** - Institute for Democracy at UMB
- **Martina Strmeňová** – Civic Initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN
- **Fedor Blaščák** – Civic Mobilization Campaign „I Don't Want to Stay Here “

Moderator: **Michal Havran** - publicist

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*17.30 – 18.00 coffee break*

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17.55 – 19.30 (ZÁHRADA, Cultural Centre)

## Duel „Five minutes to six“ in ZÁHRADA

### ➤ **Power dynamics and the role of regions - Who are the architects of Slovakia's future?**

The topic of the discussion will be the role of regions and municipalities in the effort to elevate Slovakia to the level of a modern European country. During the discussion, the speakers will address some



of the following questions: Is the central power, but also the intellectual elites, failing in their relationship with the regions? How much attention is needed to be given to what is happening in the regions in order to avoid it becoming a "Márquez fantasy"? Why should the remainder of Slovakia be interested in "ordinary" events happening on the other side of the republic? To what extent can local governments cultivate society and in what ways are they capable of doing so? If it is true that party tribalism is limited within the regions, where are the boundaries of value leaders caught between pragmatism and (value) embezzlement?

- **Michal Vašečka** – Sociologist and university lecturer
- **Ondrej Lunter** – Head of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region

Moderator: **Karolína Piliarová** – Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS)

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*19.30. - 22.00 informal networking in ZÁHRADA, Cultural Centre*

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## **THURSDAY, November 30<sup>th</sup> - 2023**

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10.00 – 12.30 (State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica, Lazovná Street)

### **➤ Informal Educational Programs Focused on the Development of Human Rights and Democracy for Primary and Secondary Schools**

#### **Presentation**

Presentation about education in Czechia, focused on the topics of democracy and human rights development, and about the offer of formal and informal educational programs for primary and secondary schools.

#### **Roundtable**

What is the potential of the non-governmental sector in relation to education? How can collaboration between schools and NGOs look like, especially in the field of informal values-based education for primary and secondary schools? What are the obstacles of such collaboration? What can these organizations realistically offer? Are schools even in need of them? Where is the intersection in relationships between educational institutions and educational organizations in the field of value-based education? And where are the blank spaces, in which there aren't even prerequisites for partnership with non-governmental organizations?

#### **Organizations Addressed:**

Center for Community Organizing, Foundation Stop Corruption, Institute for Active Citizenship, Post Bellum, Open Society Foundation, Forum of World Religions, Foundation for Children of Slovakia, Milan Šimečka Foundation, People in Need, Socrates Institute, and Živica, Volunteer Centers and Organizations Platform, Faculty of Education MBU, History-Differently, Growni.  
(Interested organizations may apply)

**Institutions Addressed:**

Ministry of Education, National Institute for Education and Youth, State School Inspection, Founders: Education unions of self-governing regions, Education unions of municipalities, Association of Private Schools.

Moderator: **Zuzana Čáčová** – IOM coordinator

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*12.30 – 13.30 Lunch (State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica)*

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13.30 – 15.00 (State Scientific Library BB)

➤ **Implementation of Cross-Curricular Value-Based Education in Practice + Financial Call for Primary and Secondary Schools**

**Panel Discussion**

In 2020, the State Pedagogical Institute and the Foundation Stop Corruption signed a memorandum of cooperation, with the aim of developing a methodology for implementing cross-curricular value-based education in primary and secondary schools. Representatives from schools, non-governmental organizations, state institutions, and professional organizations collaborated in creating this methodology. In 2023, the Ministry of Education announced a financial call (€105,000) to support the implementation of cross-curricular value-based education into the practices of primary and secondary schools and school facilities. What are the experiences gained from this collaboration in introducing cross-curricular value-based education at schools? How shall we develop this initiative in the upcoming years?

**Martin Kríž** – Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic

**Ivan Pavlov** – National Institute of Education and Youth

**Ľuboslava Bieliková** – Principal of Primary School

**Silvia Mašlárová** – Banská Bystrica Regional Government

**Maroš Chmelík** – Center for Community Organizing - Schools for Democracy

Moderator: **Csilla Droppová** - Civic Initiative NOT IN OUR TOWN and HUMAN FORUM Coordinator

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The foreign political dimension of the event is supported by:



Organised in cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of Civil Society



**Forum participants:** students, academics, representatives of embassies in Slovakia, politicians, representatives of state and local governments, representatives of non-governmental non-profit organizations, educational institutions (teachers, pupils), media representatives

*Participation fee: the conference is free of charge.*

### **Organizational Committee**

Jarmila Androvičová  
Alexandra Bitušíková  
Martina Bolečeková  
Pavol Demeš  
Csilla Droppová  
Antónia Jurečková  
Beata Hirt

Chuck Hirt  
Maroš Chmelík  
Ivan Chorvát  
Diana Jacková  
Ingrid Krajčovičová  
Peter Medveď  
Jozef Michal Mintal

Martina Strmeňová  
Zuzana Čáčová  
Peter Terem  
Benjamin Uhrin  
Róbert Vancel  
Milan Zvada  
Jolana Nátherová

### **Contact**

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