

XI. year of HUMAN FORUM

on the topic

***Strengthening democracy and civil society
in the 21st century***

Democracy In danger !

International Forum on Democracy and Human Rights

Under the auspices of:

the Public Defender of Rights in the Slovak Republic **Róbert Dobrovodský**

Rector of Matej Bel University **Vladimír Hiadlovský**

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

Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region **Ondrej Lunter**

the Mayor of Banská Bystrica **Ján Nosko**

Date: 19 - 21 November 2024 (Tuesday - Thursday)

Venue:

Banská Bystrica
Historic Town Hall
Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, UMB
State Scientific Library in BB
ZÁHRADA - centre of independent culture
Unity Baptist Brethren Church

Forum organizers:

Civic Platform NIE V NAŠOM MESTE
Institute for Democracy at UMB

in cooperation:

Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the MBU
Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica
Centre for Community Organising, o.z. in Banská Bystrica
ZÁHRADA - centre of independent culture, n.o.

with support:

Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region
Town of Banská Bystrica
State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica
Embassy of France in Slovakia

On 19-21 November 2024, the eleventh edition of the human rights forum "HUMAN FORUM - Democracy in Danger!" will take place in Banská Bystrica, initiated by the informal civic platform NIE V NAŠOM MESTE in Banská Bystrica.

HUMAN FORUM is an established international discussion forum on democracy and human rights. Since 2014, it has been working in Banská Bystrica with themes resonating with the public, academic and civic sectors. It is a space for building partnerships for local, regional and international democratic communities, a place for education, a platform for open debates, promotion of democracy, tolerance and respect for human rights.

HUMAN FORUM creates opportunities for the civil sector and academia to meet with senior public, private and government officials from the domestic and international arena. It brings together three diverse days of debates, roundtables and workshops under the overarching thematic key - Democracy at Risk.

The first day of the Forum is filled with the theme of the political and practical importance of building democracy from below. The second day adds a link to science, research and academia to the agenda. The third layer of the forum is a look at education as it connects to the work of the non-governmental sector and is packed with practical input for teachers of all grade levels. The programme is complemented each day with debates open to the wider public and a variety of artistic inputs.

The theme of democratic local communities is ever relevant and essential to the maintenance of a democratic polity in any free country. Without democracy from below, it is impossible to build a strong, sustainable and resilient democratic society as a whole. The eleventh edition of the event is thematically linked to the civil society meetings called "small HUMAN FORUM", organized in different regions of Slovakia in 2023 and 2024

Civil society based on the principles of creating tolerant local communities can mitigate the impact of political struggles. These are evident not only in Slovakia, but also in other countries in Europe and the world that claim to have advanced levels of democracy and political culture. Reflecting on these global social trends, we have decided to bring together people and organisations that play a significant role in building healthy democratic local communities through the HUMAN FORUM event.

The eleventh edition of the HUMAN FORUM event will take place in an atmosphere where the current political and state leaders are trying to question the importance of a free civil society, unprecedentedly attacking NGOs, discrediting them in the eyes of the public, without the standard procedure that belongs to the authorities of justice in the case of suspicions. It is in our interest that this edition provides a space for interactive discussions with various partners from international organisations and institutions, with representatives of public and state administration, civil society, academia and the private business sector on how to harness the potential of such a broad partnership.

The civic platform NIE V NAŠOM MESTE, which is the main organiser of the HUMAN FORUM event, has declared the need for mutual tolerance and understanding between races, nations and different faiths since its inception. That is why, in cooperation with the Catholic, Evangelical and other churches in Banská Bystrica, we are preparing an ecumenical service for the seventh time.

The aim of the forum is

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

HUMAN FORUM 2024 Programme

TUESDAY - 19 NOVEMBER 2024

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

Registration

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

Opening of the conference

- Csilla Droppová and Robert Vancel
Civic Initiative NIE V NAŠOM MESTE and the Institute for Democracy at UMB
- **Ondrej Lunter** - Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region
- **Ján Nosko** - Mayor of Banská Bystrica
- **Vladimír Hiadlovský** - Rector of Matej Bel University

➤ **Attitude of international communities towards cooperation with civil society**

- Tea Jaliashvili
First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR of OSCE)

➤ **The role of civil society in the development of democracy and respect for human rights in Slovakia**

- Róbert Dobrovodský - Public Defender of Rights of the Slovak Republic (tbc)

➤ **A word with the President of the Slovak Republic Peter Pellegrini**

on the quality of democracy in the Slovak Republic and the importance of civil society

- H.E. Peter Pellegrini - President of the Slovak Republic (tbc)

Moderator: Laura Dittel

➤ **The role of civil society in a democratic Europe**

- Vladimír Šucha - Head of the European Commission Representation in the Slovak Republic

➤ **Signs of populism in the regions of Eastern and Central Europe**

- Catherine Fieschi - European University Institute

12.00 - 13.00 lunch

13.00 - 14.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

➤ **The importance of local civic communities for the quality of democracy in a country**

Panel discussion

on the importance of strengthening local democracies that are resilient to manifestations of radicalization, extremism, nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia and other manifestations of intolerance to hatred, especially in the current geopolitical situation of Russia's war of aggression against the sovereign state of Ukraine. Panel discussion on the need for local communities to maintain a democratic system in a free country. Is it possible to build a strong, sustainable and resilient democratic society as a whole without democracy from below? More specifically, what is the state of civil society and its engagement across countries?

- Grigory Mesežnikov - political scientist
- Ludovít Ódor - Member of the European Parliament (tbc)
- Filip Vagač - Platform for Democracy
- NGO sector representation from HU
- NGO sector representation from PL
- NGO sector representation from CZ

Moderator: Ján Orlovský

14.30- 15.00 coffee break

15.00 - 17.00 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

➤ **Practical insights from local civic communities in Slovakia**

Abstract: The topic of democratic local communities is topical and essential for the maintenance of a democratic system in any free country. Without democracy from below, it is impossible to build a strong, sustainable and resilient democratic society as a whole. The eleventh edition of the event is thematically linked to the civil society meetings called "small HUMAN FORUMs" organized in different regions of the country in 2023 and 2024. We have worked with several local communities and in this panel we bring the knowledge of how unique each region, each community is. Their needs and demands are different and we will seek inspiration and answers to the question of how to initiate and stimulate the emergence of such active communities.

➤ **Starting points for community organising**

- Maroš Chmelík, Centre for Community Organising

➤ **Video compilation of reports from regional meetings**

- prepared by Lýdia Bodnárová from Revúca

➤ **The reality of local civic communities in Slovak regions and the "small HUMAN FORUM" initiative**

Panel discussion

- Tomáš Bálint - CITADELA - community and cultural centre in Rimavská Sobota
- Janka Popovicsová - HIDEPARK - community and cultural centre in Nitra
- Krasimír Damjanov - Lučenec
- Diana Jacková - Riava, o.z., Revúca
- Jaroslav Stehlík - Ľudskosť Platform, Zvolen

Moderator: Csilla Droppová

16.30 - 17.00 coffee break

17.00 - 18.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

Gala evening

➤ **Interview with ambassadors on support for active civil society in Slovakia**

Moderator: Pavol Demeš

➤ **HUMAN FORUM award winners**

Presented by Csilla Droppová and Alexandra Bitušíková - civic initiative NIE V NAŠOM MESTE

➤ **Opening of the exhibition " Demo 21 "**

Exhibition of the students of the Faculty of Fine Arts AU BB

- The exhibition will be opened by Michal Murin - Rector of the Academy of Arts
 - Curator of the exhibition: Gabriela Birošová - Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica
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18.30 - 20.00 Raut

18.00 - 19.30 (Baptist Unity Church)

➤ **Christian, Muslim and Jew meet...**

Interfaith discussion

about the diverse world around us. In an audience favourite format, we will open up everyday situations and themes that each of us experience similarly and yet in our own way.

Moderator: **Mário Nicollini** – co founder of Fórum náboženstiev

19.30 - 20.00 (Baptist Unity Church)

A short interview with **Peter Gombito**, a Roman Catholic priest and pastor who is known in Slovakia for running marathons for the poor.

"Today, when I work with the poorest people, I see how evil has shattered their lives, their families and their health. And I see that when such a 'broken' person invites God into their life, their life gradually changes and heals."

Moderator: Ondrej Druga – initiative Kresťania proti nenávisti

20.00 - 21.00 (Baptist Unity Church)

➤ **Ecumenical service**

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 Brethren, the Jewish community, the Islamic community and others.

Speech by preacher **Peter Gombita**

WEDNESDAY - 20. 11. 2024

8.00 - 8.45 (parking lot of the Kúria Banská Bystrica hotel)

➤ **Morning run for good**

with preacher and ultramarathoner Peter Gombita

Meeting place:

Kúria Hotel parking lot, Bakossova 4, Banská Bystrica
(GPS:N 048 44.264, E 19 8.737)

9:00 - 11:00 (FPSIR Aula)

Opening of Day II of the conference

Branislav Kováčik - Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University

➤ **Opening presentation (tbs)**

➤ **Erik Jones** - Director of the Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute in Florence

➤ **What does science tell us about regional development? How does economic inequality affect discontent and threaten democracy?**

Panel discussion

Abstract: What does science tell us about uneven regional development and the rise of democratic discontent? Across Europe, the rise of populism reflects the "revenge of places that don't matter" - communities that have no access to economic development and have been abandoned by social and political systems. This panel discussion will explore the 'geography of discontent', focusing on regions experiencing long-term decline, social exclusion and rising populism. Slovakia, one of the most centralized countries in Europe, faces deep regional disparities, making it a key case for understanding how economic marginalization fosters political instability. Join us in uncovering the links between economic inequality, regional stagnation, and growing support for populist movements across Europe and beyond, and considering the global implications of these trends for democracy and governance.

11.00 - 11.30 coffee break

11:30 - 13:00 (FPSIR Aula)

➤ **The decline of trust and polarised politics: perspectives from inside Slovakia as well as from abroad.**

Panel discussion

Abstract: This panel discusses findings from the election advisory app Voter Compass and related research on the recent national parliamentary elections in Slovakia, highlighting the increasing fragmentation of voter loyalty and deepening affective polarization. Slovak voters are currently aligning themselves with some party positions while disagreeing with other positions of the same party, thus the political scene is experiencing significant shifts. By placing the Slovak experience in a broader European context, the discussion will offer a comparative perspective on how similar patterns of fragmentation and polarisation affect voter behaviour, party systems and democratic stability in Europe and beyond.

13.00 - 14.00 Joint lunch (Common room, FPSIR)

14.00 - 15.30 (FPSIR room P4)

➤ **Cooperation between state representatives and active civil society**
Round table

Roundtable discussion with Simona Zacharova (tbc), Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development, Róbert Dobrovodský, Public Defender of Rights, Radim Dvořák, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Slovakia, and representatives of civil society organisations on the development of civil society in Slovakia and on cooperation in respecting human rights.

Moderated by **Peter Terem** and **Alexandra Bitušíková**

Move to ZÁHRADA - Centre for Independent Culture

17.00 - 18.30 (ZÁHRADA)

Public discussion

➤ **Polarization vs. merging**

Public discussion (not only) with local actors about protests, petitions, strikes, discussions on social networks, cooperation and non-cooperation, about dividing and joining ... and about many other phenomena and manifestations in response to events in society... (tbs)

17.30 - 18.00 coffee break

19.00 - 20.30 (ZÁHRADA)

Public discussion

➤ **Shrinking space for civil society: what can we do at regional level?**

Abstract: Civil society, human rights defenders and advocates in Slovakia are currently facing hate speech and efforts to discredit or limit their participation in governance by government and political leaders. NGOs may thus lose credibility and favour in society, as well as intrinsic motivation to do good, due to a lack of social recognition. Could this situation be an opportunity to support civil society at local government level? In what other ways can the current unfavourable situation of civil society in Slovakia be counterbalanced?

- **Silvia Porubánová** - Director of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
- **Ondrej Lunter** - Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (tbc)
- **Milan Zvada** - director of the independent cultural centre ZÁHRADA
- **Filip Vagač** - Platform for Democracy
- **Csilla Droppová** - coordinator of HUMAN FORUM

Moderator: **Jakub Popík**

19.30 - 22.00 wine cup and informal discussions, networking in ZÁHRADA

THURSDAY - 21. 11. 2024

9.30 - 11.00 (State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica)

➤ Informal educational programmes for primary and secondary schools in the Czech Republic focusing on the development of human rights and democracy

Presentation

- Miroslava Hapalová

Presentation on education for democracy and human rights development in the Czech Republic, on the offer of formal and non-formal educational programmes for primary and secondary schools. Comparison of similarities and differences in the conditions created for non-formal education programmes in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

➤ A word with the Minister

Interview

- Tomáš Drucker - Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic

Moderated conversation about the potential of the NGO sector for cooperation in the field of non-formal value education in primary and secondary schools, about possible obstacles to such cooperation, about what NGOs should and could offer and whether schools need them, about the intersection of relations between educational institutions and educational organizations in the field of value education, about white spots on the map of Slovakia, where there are not even the prerequisites for partnership cooperation between schools and NGOs.

Moderator: **Juraj Hipš**

11.00 - 11.30 coffee break

11.30 - 13.00 (State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica)

➤ **Will cooperation with NGOs in non-formal education for democracy and human rights expand or contract in the future?**

Panel discussion

Abstract: What is Slovakia's level and vision for education for democracy and human rights? What role should or could NGOs play in this field of education? How to prevent indoctrination of education by any ideology? Do schools have sufficient elements of democratic self-government, at what point could it be possible to consider lowering the voting age in Slovakia, similar to the situation in Belgium, Sweden, Norway and other European countries?

- **Martin Kríž** - Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic (tbc)
- **Tina Gažovičová** - Member of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic
- **Maroš Chmelík** - Director of the Center for Community Organizing - Schools for Democracy
- **Juraj Lizák** - Director of the Youth Council of Slovakia

Moderator: **Csilla Droppová**

13.00 - 14.00 Joint lunch (SSL BB)

15.00 - 17.00 (Academy of Arts Theatre)

➤ **Stay in Slovakia to study, work and live?**

"PUBLIC HUMAN FORUM DEBATE"

Why not leave Slovakia to study, to work, to live abroad, or why not return home after your experiences abroad... Why and whether to stay in Slovakia will be able to ask, or to reflect their opinion and attitude with successful young people working in Slovakia, as well as with representatives of our country, working in Slovakia or abroad.

Invited guests for discussion with students:

- **Gabriela Birošová, Robert Vancel, Diana Jacková**
- **Iveta Radičová, Pavol Čekan (tbc), Ivana Molnárová**

Moderator: **Pavel Bruchala**

After the discussion, the informal debate between students and guests will continue

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.

Organizing Committee

Alexandra Bitušíková
Martina Bolečeková
Kamila Borseková
Pavol Demeš
Csilla Droppová
Beata Hirt
Chuck Hirt

Maroš Chmelík
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