

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:

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

Rector of Matej Bel University **Vladimír Hiadlovský**

Rector of the Academy of Arts **Michal Murin**

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
GARDEN - centre of independent culture
Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica
Unity Baptist Brethren Church

Forum organizers: Civic Platform NIE V NAŠOM MESTE
Institute for Democracy at UMB

in cooperation: Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica
Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica
Centre for Community Organising, o.z.
ZÁHRADA - centre of independent culture, n.o.

with support: European University Institute in Florence
Permanent Representation of the European Commission in the Slovak Republic
Embassy of France in Slovakia
Embassy of the USA in Slovakia
Europe Direct UMB Banská Bystrica
City of Banská Bystrica
Faculty of Political Science and International Relations
State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica
Banská Bystrica self-governing region

On 19-21 November 2024, the eleventh annual 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 a well-established international discussion forum on democracy and human rights. Since 2014, it has been working in Banská Bystrica on topics resonating with the public, academic and civil society 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 civic 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 links 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 filled 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 subject of democratic local communities is still relevant 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 thematically follows the civil society meetings, the so-called "small HUMAN FORUMs", organized in different regions of Slovakia in 2023 and 2024.

Civil society, underpinned by 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 around 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 several current representatives of political and state power 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 justice authorities in the case of suspicions. It is in our interest that this edition provides a space for interactive discussions with various partners from international organizations 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 NOT IN OUR CITY, which is the main organizer of the HUMAN FORUM event, has declared the need for mutual tolerance and mutual understanding between races, nations and different religions since the beginning of its existence. 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

- deepen awareness of fundamental values in a democratic society,
- call for respect and dignity for human rights,
- pointing out shortcomings and negative social phenomena such as intolerance and extremism,
- Find tools to address them, including prevention and deradicalization,
- contribute to the spread of tolerance in society.

HUMAN FORUM 2024 Programme

TUESDAY - 19. 11. 2024

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

Register

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

Opening of the conference

- **Csilla Droppová and Róbert 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

Opening speech by **Róbert Dobrovodský** Public Defender of Rights in the Slovak Republic

- **The attitude of international communities towards cooperation with civil society**
 - **Tea Jaliashvili**
First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights - Organisations for Security and Cooperation in Europe (ODIHR of OSCE)
 - **The role of civil society in a democratic Europe**
 - **Vladimír Šucha** - Head of Representation of the European Commission in the Slovak Republic
 - **Social rights of citizens and their importance for the stability of civil society.**
 - **Monika Uhlerová** - President of the Confederation of Trade Unions
- Moderator: Karolína Piliarová
- **Signs of populism in the regions of Eastern and Central Europe**
 - **Catherine Fieschi** - Political Analyst, European University Institute in Florence

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 the country**

Panel discussion

the importance of strengthening local democracies that are resistant to manifestations of radicalisation, extremism, nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia and other manifestations of intolerance and even 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 Mesezhnikov** - political scientist
- **Filip Vagač** - Platform for Democracy
- **Mester Zotán** - Emberség Erejével Alapítvány (Power of Humanity Foundation), HU
- **Barbara Sadowska** - Barka Foundation, PL
- **Simona-Alexandra Ionescu-Filip** - Anais Association, RO

Moderator: **Ján Orlovský**

14.30 - 15.00 coffee break

15.00 - 17.00 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

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

Abstract: The topic of democratic local communities is a timely and essential one for 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 thematically follows the civil society meetings - the so-called "small HUMAN FORUMs", organized in different regions of Slovakia 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, encourage and support the emergence of such active communities.

- **Background to community organising**
- **Maroš Chmelík**, Centre for Community Organising

➤ **Video compilation from regional meetings**

- processed by Lydia Bodnárová

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

Panel discussion

- Miroslava Čierna - CITADELA - community and cultural centre in Rimavská Sobota
- Janka Popovicsová - HIDEPARK - community and cultural centre in Nitra
- Krasimir Damjanov - Civic Initiative Lučenec
- Diana Jacková - Riava, o.z., Revúca
- Jaroslav Stehlík - Humanity Platform, Zvolen

Moderator: Csilla Droppová

17.00 - 17.30 coffee break

17.30 - 18.30 (Historical Town Hall - Cikker Hall)

Festive evening

➤ **Interview with ambassadors on supporting active civil society in Slovakia**

Moderator: Pavol Demeš

➤ **HUMAN FORUM award ceremony**

Presenters: Csilla Droppová and Alexandra Bitušíková - civic initiative NO IN OUR CITY

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

Exhibition of 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 Bírošová - Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica

*18.30 - 20.00 social buffet
Guided tour of the exhibition*

PARALLEL PROGRAMME at the Unity Baptist Church

Horná Strieborná No. 665, Banská Bystrica

17.15 - 18.45 (Baptist Unity Church)

➤ **Civic Campaign: Decent Housing for All**

Panel discussion

about Christian activities with homeless people. This activity is part of the Empowering Minorities for Development project, using community organizing and advocacy methods to empower disadvantaged communities in Central Slovakia

Moderator: **Lukáš Kekelák** - editor of the daily Postoj

18.45 - 20.00 (Baptist Unity Church)

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

Interreligious discussion

about the colourful world around us. In the audience favourite format, we open up everyday situations and topics that each of us experiences similarly and yet in our own way.

➤ **The principles of my faith and how I apply them in my daily life**

- **Misha Kapustin** - Rabbi
- **Rado Šaškovič** - Catholic priest
- **Martin Kováč** - Old Catholic priest
- representative of Muslim community

Moderator: **Mário Nicolini** - co-founder of the Forum of Religions

20.00 - 21.00 (Unity Baptist 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 Brethren, the Jewish community, the Islamic community and others.

Speech by Roman Catholic priest **Peter Gombita**, 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."*

WEDNESDAY - 20. 11. 2024

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

➤ **Morning run for good**

with priest and marathoner Peter Gombita

Meeting place: parking lot of the hotel Kúria, Bakossova 4, Banská Bystrica
(GPS:N 048 44.264, E 19 8.737)

WEDNESDAY - 20. 11. 2024

9:00 (FPVaMV UMB auditorium)

Opening of the Second Day of the Conference at FPVaMV UMB

Kuzmányho 1, Banská Bystrica

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

9:05 - 11:00 (FPVaMV UMB auditorium)

➤ **Opening presentation: Choice, Discontent and the Narrow Path to Democratic Legitimacy**

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

➤ **The Geography of Discontent: How Economic Inequality Fuels Democratic Discontent in Europe**

Panel discussion

Abstract: What does science tell us about the uneven development of regions and the rise of democratic discontent? Across Europe, the populist surge reflects the "revenge of the places that don't matter"—communities locked out of economic progress and left behind by social and political systems. This panel discussion will explore the "geography of discontent," focusing on regions that have experienced long-term decline, social exclusion, and rising populism. Slovakia, one of Europe's most centralized countries, faces profound regional disparities, making it a key case for understanding how economic marginalization fosters political instability. Join us as we unpack the connections between economic inequality, regional stagnation, and the growing support for populist movements across Europe and beyond, and consider the global implications of these trends for democracy and governance.

- **Erik Jones** - European University Institute in Florence
- **Oksana Antonenko** - European University Institute in Florence
- **Kamila Borseková** - Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica

Moderator: **Katarína Vitálišová**, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica

11.00 - 11.30 coffee break

11:30 - 13:00 (FPVaMV UMB auditorium)

➤ **Fragmented Loyalties and Polarized Politics: Insights from Slovakia and Beyond**

Panel discussion

Abstract: This panel delves into the findings from the Volebný Kompas voting advice application and related research on Slovakia's recent national elections, highlighting the increasing fragmentation of voter loyalties and the deepening of affective polarization. As Slovak voters simultaneously align with some party positions while diverging on others, the landscape of political representation is undergoing significant shifts. By situating Slovakia's experience within a broader European context, the session will offer comparative insights into how similar patterns of fragmentation and polarization are affecting voter behavior, party systems, and democratic stability across Europe and beyond.

- **Petra Alderman** - University of Birmingham
- **Bogdan Ianosev** - Institute for Democracy at UMB
- **Felix Butzlaff** - Central European University in Vienna

Moderator: **Jozef Michal Mintal**, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica

13.00 - 14.00 Common lunch (FPVaMV common room)

14.00 - 15.30 (FPVaMV UMB, lecture room P4)

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

Round table

Roundtable discussion with Martin Giertl from the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development, Director General of the Section for the Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms Tomáš Čitbaj (who will speak instead of the Ombudsman), Radim Dvořák, Deputy Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia, Marcel Zajac, President of the Chamber of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations at the Government Council of the Slovak Republic, and representatives of civil society organisations on the development of civil society in Slovakia and on cooperation in respecting human rights.

Moderators **Peter Terem** and **Alexandra Bitušíková**, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica

move to ZÁHRADA - Centre of Independent Culture

17.00 - 18.30 (ZÁHRADA, cnk)

Public discussion

➤ **"Uniting vs. polarisation" aka "Protests, strikes, petitions ... "**

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

- **Alžbeta Lukáčová** - Cultural Strike
- **Patrik Dubovský** - Institute of the Memory of the Nation
- **Vanesa Štítnická** - Klíma ťa potrebuje, o.z.
- **Ivan Chorvát** - civic initiative NIE V NAŠOM MESTE

Moderator: **Karolína Piliarová**

18.30 - 19.00 coffee break

19.00 - 20.30 (ZÁHRADA, cnk)

Public discussion

➤ **Shrinking space for civil society: what can we do at the 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 representatives. 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
- **Ján Beljak** - Vice-Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region
- **Milan Zvada** - director of the independent cultural centre ZÁHRADA
- **Marcel Zajac** - Chairman of the Chamber of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations at the Slovak Government Council for NGOs
- **Csilla Droppová** - HUMAN FORUM coordinator

Moderator: **Jakub Popík**

20.30 - 22.00 wine cup and informal discussions, networking in ZÁHRADA, cnk

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

- Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková - Government of the Czech Republic Commissioner for Human Rights
- Miroslava Hapalová

on education for democracy and the development of human rights 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 on education for democracy

Interview with Ábel Ravasz, Adviser to the Minister of Education

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?

- **Petra Jankovská** - Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic
- **Tina Gažovičová** - Member of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic
- **Ivan Pavlov** - Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University
- **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 (ŠVK 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 come back home after studying abroad...? Why and whether to stay in Slovakia will be able to ask, or 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 Bírošová, Diana Jacková**
- **Iveta Radičová, Ondrej Lunter, 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), media representation

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
Ivan Chorvát
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