

Central European Initiative Meeting at the Prague Parliament Challenges and Opportunities of Our Time

Prague, Czech Republic, 25. November 2016



By Juraj Lajda

Under the auspices of Hon. Nina Nováková, Member of the Czech Parliament, an international conference on the topic *“Challenges and Opportunities of Our Time”* was convened at the Parliament of the Czech Republic on November 25, 2016. Over 50

participants attended the event, including historians, lawyers, political scientists, social activist, and several students. This was the final of a series of programs that included two round table discussions in Vienna and Budapest, in July and October 2016 respectively. The conference was supported by the Universal Peace

Federation’s Czech chapter, the Hans Seidel Foundation and the European Women’s Union.

Several steps led up to the conference: finding common ground between experts, politicians and civil society representatives; setting up a working group on issues of religious freedom in the Czech Parliament; expanding the initiative to neighbouring Central European countries. At the round table in Vienna, a memorandum was framed that specified three topics of concern for Europe: protecting the natural family, re-affirming European cultural identity, and upholding the freedom of conscience, thought and conviction, with an emphasis on religious freedom. These three themes became the basis of the Prague event.

The theme of the first panel was: “The Family: Obvious Foundation or a controversial issue?”

Professor Lenka Šulová from Charles University’s Faculty of Philosophy in Prague said that we need to create a society and policies that are supportive





of the family, describing current factors contributing to family breakdown: unstable relationships, easy divorce, women's high employment, emphasis on individualism or growing wealth. **Dr. Ludmila Trapková**, a clinical and family psychologist, spoke of the family as a psycho-social organism. Absence of complementarity between a masculine and a feminine pole causes problems for the child. Divorcing breaks a husband - wife partnership but not the parent - child relationship, she concluded. **Mr. Jan Gregor**, vice-president of the Young Christian Democrats, underlined the reproductive purpose of the family, saying it should be recognized as a biological construct, not just as a social one. The last speaker on the panel was Mrs. **Jana Jochová**, Director of the Committee for the Defence of Parents' Rights and an active supporter of the „Mum, Dad and Kids“ campaign. She spoke about parents' rights and responsibilities in children's education. The state cannot substitute for parents, she insisted, because the family is based on lineage.

The second panel, on the theme “Living Safely, A Basic Human Necessity “, was moderated by **Mr. Radko Hokovský**, Executive Director of a think-tank on European values.

Hon. Jaromír Štětina, a Czech member of the European Parliament, spoke about security perils in Europe, mentioning among others the hybrid

and disinformation war led by Russia in the region, the goal of which he said was to destabilize the European Union. He then showed participants a documentary film on the war in Chechnya. **Dr. Alyn Ware**, a global coordinator of the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, pointed out that current conflict between Russia and the West raise the danger of war and nuclear conflict, and called on European institutions to do their utmost to stop it. Nuclear war is meaningless he concluded; since 1945 nuclear weapons have not been used. **Dr. Juraj Lajda**, UPF Secretary General in the Czech Republic, concluded the panel by introducing the launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) in Korea in February and in London in September 2016.

The third panel focused on the theme “European Culture: Hope for Future? “

Mr. Jiří Georgiew from Charles University's Faculty of Law gave a concise overview of Central European history, remarking that European cultural heritage in the Visegrad Four nations deserved to be noted by Western European countries. **Dr. Jaroslav Šebek**, from the Czech Academy of Sciences, spoke about current affairs in Europe, underlining the influence of Brexit and American

elections on the European continent. **Dr. Roman Joch**, President of the Civic Institute in the Czech Republic, reviewed the five major influences that shaped European culture: Judaism, Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, Christianity and the Enlightenment, underlining how each value system eventually shaped Europe as we know it today. **Mr. Jacques Marion**, Secretary General of UPF Europe, noted that the decline of Christianity in Western democracy meant that equality before God was replaced by equality before the law, leading people to focus on claiming rights and inciting a tendency toward conflicts of interest. Europe needs a spiritual revival to build an ethical society in a multicultural context, he concluded, beginning with strengthening the family.

The last panel on “the Role of Religious Freedom to address Current Problems” was moderated by **Mr. Peter Zoehrer**, Secretary General of the Forum for Religious Freedom Europe (FOREF).

Dr. Aaron Rhodes, President of FOREF, began by quoting former Czech president Václav Havel's words that terms such as love, compassion or forgiveness are losing their meaning in modern time. Religion should be independent from the state, but the principle of Moses law is that all people come under one God. Human rights are derived from natural rights. We should recognize the pre-eminence of religious freedom, he insisted. Gay marriage rights, for instance, should not interfere with the freedom of religion. **Dr. Harald Scheu**, from Charles University's Faculty of Law in Prague, concluded the panel saying that religious freedom was not only an individual freedom, but was meant to guarantee the whole concept of human rights. Yet there is today a secular monopoly on the interpretation of human rights. Good and evil merely become a matter of political choice: choosing a political party makes you a good or bad person, he deplored.

Each panel gave ample time for questions and comments from the audience. The conference was reported on the TV evening news, as well as on Christian media.