



European Humanist Federation

International association under Belgian law

Fédération Humaniste Européenne

Association internationale de droit belge

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Press Release

EHF meets Hungarian Presidency of the EU

Today, 24 May 2011, the European Humanist Federation (EHF) met the Hungarian revolving Presidency of the European Union in Budapest to expose its views on humanist and secularist issues in Europe. EHF delegation was composed of David Pollock (President) and Pierre Galand (Vice-President). For their part, Churches had met the Hungarian Presidency in January.

This meeting is a step forward in the history of relationships between the EU and the humanist and secularist community: for several years, revolving presidencies had taken the habit to meet with churches. For the first time under the Belgian Presidency (July-December 2010), the EHF was invited to convey humanist concerns as well.

After a brief discussion on the place of religions and humanism and secularism in Europe, EHF raised more specifically the following issues:

The Hungarian Presidency's initiative on family policy and demographics

Whilst EHF has no objection to reasonable encouragement of larger families, it is concerned that it should not produce family poverty and is equally concerned about any moves that further restrict women's freedom over their own lives, especially any restrictions on the availability of contraception and of abortion.

On the new Hungarian Constitution

EHF recognises the high aspirations of the new constitution. There are, however, some places where it seems that the Constitution falls short of the standards of human rights that we see emerging in Europe. These points have attracted wide criticism:

- The constitution takes a very conservative view of marriage and family.
- The provision that "embryonic and foetal life shall be subject to protection from the moment of conception" is highly problematic.
- The omission of sexual orientation in the list of prohibited grounds of discriminations, such omission being all the more worrying given that police have taken steps to ban a Gay Pride march next month from approaching the Parliament building.

EHF therefore asks the government to comply with the highest possible standards of protection of fundamental rights, in particular the rights of women and minorities, including sexual minorities.

Freedom of speech, with reference to the new media law in Hungary

Like many, EHF is concerned that the new law gives future governments huge power to control or intimidate the media, with excessive requirements for registration, the threat of excessively heavy fines, and ill-defined requirements for journalists to respect "public morality" and "human dignity" and for reporting to be "balanced" - requirements that will be adjudicated by a media authority that is itself decidedly unbalanced politically.

European efforts to tackle discriminations

EHF asked what progress the Hungarian Presidency was making in winning approval for the draft Directive on non-discrimination in areas other than employment.

EHF also suggested that there was a serious discrepancy between the standards of human rights and freedom that the EU seeks to enforce on candidate members and on recipients of aid and its failure to enforce those standards within its own frontiers. On the latter, the EU risks being seen as seriously hypocritical, as it does nothing effective to call to account member states that abuse the human rights of refugees, Roma and other unpopular minorities.

EHF wishes to thank the Hungarian authorities for this frank and friendly meeting during which they provided detailed answers to our concerns. Contacts have been made with the next Polish presidency to organise a similar meeting in due time.

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