

Human rights in the struggle for freedom in the past and today

On the 45th anniversary of Charter 77

Event: International Scientific Conference

Venue: Bratislava

Date: 4 October 2022

Organisers: Club 89 Civic Association, Nation's Memory Institute

The struggle for human rights and their respect played a significant role in the struggle against non-democratic regimes in the recent history of the Central and Eastern European countries. The Helsinki Process, in which the signatory countries also monitored the respect for human rights in their countries, undermined the previously solid foundations of the communist regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and paved the way for the "miracle year" of 1989, in which the Iron Curtain fell, the Soviet bloc collapsed, and freedom and democracy were restored in its countries. The democratic revolutions - known as the "Gentle Revolution" in our country - meant the possibility of putting human rights into practice. At the same time, many legal norms have been adopted and several institutes have been established in the individual countries to apply and strengthen the modern concept of human rights. Nevertheless, the key importance of human rights continues to be called into question, both in memory politics (where efforts to question and glorify the crimes of non-democratic regimes can be seen) and in everyday life.

The second edition of the conference will commemorate the significant 45th anniversary of the founding of Charter 77, an open community of people of different convictions, different faiths, and different professions who strived for the respect of human and civil rights in Czechoslovakia. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, it was the first association to explicitly strive for respect for human rights. The most famous signatory and face of Charter 77 was the well-known Czech dissident Václav Havel, leader of the Velvet Revolution in Prague in the autumn of 1989 and long-time President of the Czech Republic. Among the hundreds of signatories are also political scientist Miroslav Kusý and writer Dominik Tatarka. The Charter wasn't signed by a large number of people, but it still provoked a great response in the society of the time. Although the documents it published had a broad content, they were mainly concerned with the issue of violations of civil rights by the communist regime, both individual cases of the persecuted and cases that affected a particular community.

The conference will be the second event in a regular series of conferences devoted to the issue of human rights as a key value of modern democratic society, but also as a memento resulting from their violation by non-democratic regimes in Slovakia and East-Central Europe in the past. The conference program will include presentations by experts from Slovakia and the European Union countries, and the non-European participants also feel free to join. The conference will enable the exchange of the latest research results, provide a forum for discussion on the issue and initiate cooperation between researchers and exchange of experiences between experts from several countries. It will also enable young researchers and students working in the field to discover new topics for their further studies and research.

The conference will cover the following topics:

- Charter 77 - origins, activities, and consequences for society in Slovakia and abroad;
- The Helsinki Process and its impact on communist regimes in the 1980s;
- Human rights before and after 1989 - their structure and concepts;
- The role of human rights in contemporary society.

The deadline for abstract submissions is July 31, 2022. Please, send a short abstract, along with the title of the paper and a brief CV, to peter.jasek@upn.gov.sk. The organizers reserve the right to select the participants.