



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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Fundamental Rights Forum 2018 connect.reflect.act

Address by Dunja Mijatović
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
25 September 2018

Dear participants of the Forum,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Fundamental Rights Agency for organising this event during which you will discuss several important issues. Many of these topics are of particular interest to me.

One is for example artificial intelligence. AI has the potential to help human beings maximise their time, freedom and happiness, but if it remains ungoverned, it may well lead us in the opposite direction. AI may indeed affect a whole range of human rights, from privacy and equality to freedom of expression and assembly. When data-based decision making reflects societal prejudices, it reproduces – or even reinforces – the biases of that society.

Another topic is migration. In spite of the decreasing numbers of new asylum-seekers arriving in Europe, strong anti-migrant rhetoric is on the increase in many European countries. Many governments, including within the EU, are not only failing to provide basic facilities to those in need, but are opposing the reception and integration of migrants and asylum-seekers with short-sighted and inhumane laws and policies. Meanwhile, the number of migrants dying in the Mediterranean has reached its highest since 2015. This situation is compounded by a persisting lack of transparency, accountability and coordination on migration-related policies and practices in EU member states.

Of related concern are increasingly intolerant attitudes and behaviour towards minorities, stoked by the inflammatory discourse of certain politicians. Muslim communities, Roma and other minorities are more and more ostracised by the toxic atmosphere of “us versus them” that is present in many European countries.

If this were not enough, stigmatising rhetoric and restrictive legislation is now also affecting the work of NGOs and individuals operating in the field of human rights. Providing humanitarian or legal assistance to migrants and asylum-seekers is a criminal offence in some European states. NGOs performing search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean have faced several obstacles in carrying out their work.

Administrative burdens have made it increasingly difficult for many other NGOs to speak up for the voiceless or to co-operate with international partners.

These are just a few examples which characterise European countries' departure from their commitment to uphold human rights values and standards. It will not be easy to counteract this deterioration. But we can and we must do it.

We must stand up for the values that underpin the European system of human rights protection. We must work to return the values of equality, respect, diversity, and inclusiveness to their rightful place in political discussion.

If we team up, join our forces and engage with the public at large, we can reverse the negative trend. I therefore welcome this Forum as an opportunity to move together towards that goal.

I wish you a very fruitful discussion and look forward to engaging with you to protect human rights for all.