

Bonner Querschnitte

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ISHR President holds Guest Lecture at the New Bulgarian University

(Bonn, 19.11.2014) The President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights has held a guest lecture entitled “The Advantages of Religious Freedom for Minorities for Society – Lessons from Global Experience” at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria. Prof. Thomas Schirmmacher’s lecture served to open a symposium entitled “Balkans and the Rights of Minority Groups: International legislation, Social Practices and State Policy”. Schirmmacher pointed to research work documenting that the protection of religious freedom for minorities brings about a more peaceful society and has economic advantages. On the other hand, the oppression of minorities can make society on the whole more prone to violence. It can also be the case that the often well educated minorities and their commercial contacts can serve society if they are allowed to freely unfold.



Thomas Schirmmacher during his lecture

The scholarly notions of Bulgarian academics collided in the Symposium, as the head of the Institute for Historical research at the Bulgarian Academy of Science, Prof. Dr. Valery Stoyanov, meticulously sketched out the last 100 years of history of Muslims in Bulgaria. He demonstrated that up to the present day, most Muslims have been forced away into Turkey (“models of state policy in regulating of the minority problems”), while the Chairman of the History Faculty of the New Bulgarian Society, Prof. Dr. Lachezar Stoyanov, was of the opinion that Muslims should be glad that they have more freedoms than in Turkey and that a country such as Bulgaria, owing to its history, is justified in operating as it does (“Bulgarian constitution, political institutions and religious rights”).

Within the framework of the guest lecture, Schirmmacher met with the Grand Mufti of Bulgaria, Ahmed Ahmedov, and the President of the Central Israelite Religious Council and General Secretary of the National Council of Religious Communities in Bulgaria (NCRCB), Marcel Israel.



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In addition, Schirmmacher visited the leading Evangelical seminary in the country, Saint Trivelius Institute, Sofia, under the direction of the Academic Dean, Dr. Kamelia Slavcheva.

The Advantage of Religious Freedom for Minorities

Summary of the special guest lecture at the consultation “Balkans and the Rights of Minority Groups: International legislation, social practices and state policy” at New Bulgarian University, Sofia, May, 21, 2014

Thomas Schirmmacher

The basic thesis, which is supported by an enormous wealth of examples, statistics, and investigation, is simple: In countries with religious freedom there is much more social peace than in countries without it. Or in other words: The argument of many countries with a dominating majority religion, that they have to keep a check on smaller religions for the sake of social peace, is contradicted by reality. Restriction of religious freedom is often in the first instance the reason for violent conflicts. Religious homogeneity does not guarantee freedom from conflict, but it apparently encourages tensions.

Particularly noticeable is the study of Samuel Huntington’s theory that assumes violence and unrest are the consequences of a clash of civilizations. This thesis does not do justice to the internal diversity found within religions and cultures, for instance the tension between Sunnites and Shiites within an Islamic country. All of the available figures contradict the thesis that it is the tension between cultures which can cause additional tensions. It is rather in a certain sense the suppression of these tensions in favor of an alleged monoculture in a country which intensifies the tensions.

Religious freedom viewed on the whole has increased in Christian countries in the sixty years from 1945 to 2005 and has decreased in Islamic countries. This means that overall there is less religious freedom in Islamic countries than there was a century ago – and the development still remains regressive. The development within the Islamic countries proves the thesis above:

1. In Islamic countries in which there is almost exclusively no religious freedom, the level of violence and the propensity towards civil war is very high. In Islamic majority religious countries with religious freedom, there is more or less peace, e.g. in Albania or Gambia.
2. Terrorist movements predominantly come from countries without religious freedom. In a few exceptions much less damage is caused in their own countries and they are not active internationally but nationally. E.g. Saudi Arabia totally restricts religious freedom. Yet they do not produce a peaceful, monocultural country, but huge tensions with non-Wahhabite groups, like other Sunnites, Shiites, Muslim among the millions of workers from Asia etc. And Saudi Arabia with its very strict Islam still brought forth global terrorist movements being even stricter, the best known being Al-Kaida.

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Literature

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Thomas Schirrmacher. *Freedom of Religion and European Identity: Collective list of questions for the public hearing by the German Parliament's Commission for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid on October 27, 2010*. IIRF-Report Vol. 2, no. 10.

http://www.freedomofconscience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/iirf_report_10.pdf

Downloads:

- [Photo](#): Thomas Schirrmacher during his lecture

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