



In collaboration with



Return of the death penalty in Europe: genuine threat or populist fiction?

10 October 2017

Room 2, 'Palais de l'Europe', Council of Europe

Context

For decades, the abolition of the death penalty has been one of the main priorities for the Council of Europe. The efforts deployed by the Council of Europe and its Member States to outlaw the death penalty across Europe have made abolition a universally accepted value. As a result, this year we can celebrate 20 years without executions. It is an immeasurable progress for humanity.

However, the threat of a return of the death penalty is never far, especially today, when Europe is facing a significant number of crises. The fears caused by these crises, amplified by the media, increase xenophobia and hate speech. This reaction and the resulting consequences are instrumentalised by demagogues using a populist, pseudo-security discourse that endangers human rights. On the pretext of fighting against terrorism, notably of religious nature, some people call for the use of the death penalty. However, this discourse, which in the past would have given rise to strong reactions, no longer seems to encounter strong opposition, even within European countries.

The Conference of INGOs remains convinced that the death penalty is not the solution and that the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) as well as its additional Protocols 6 and 13 should be defended in all circumstances. To do so, the Conference of INGOs, in collaboration with the International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT), one of its members, is organising a debate on 10 October 2017 aimed at strengthening and better coordinating the fight against the threat of a return of the death penalty in Europe.

In the European area freed from state-sponsored executions for the past 20 years, this fight requires new modes of action along with our unconditional commitment to the right of everyone to life and to full recognition of human dignity as a fundamental value in a democratic society (ECHR, Protocol 13).

The Conference of INGOs, as usual, organizes this debate by associating several categories of stakeholders: Council of Europe personalities, emblematic figures who contributed to the abolition of the death penalty in the Member States and those who continue to fight in the Observer States, experts, representatives of diplomatic delegations to the Council of Europe, NGOs, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), representatives of International and Regional Human Rights Organisations, and above all, families of victims of terrorist attacks.

Draft Programme

09.00-09.30 Opening session

Welcome and moderation:

Anna RURKA, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

Opening Speeches:

- Laima JUREVIČIENĖ, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the Council of Europe, Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy of the Committee of Ministers (tbc)
- Snezana SAMARDZIC-MARKOVIC, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe (tbc)
- Video message from Sister Helen PREJEAN, founder of Ministry Against the Death Penalty and author of “Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty”
- Marc BOSSUYT, Commissioner, International Commission against the Death Penalty

09.30-10.30 Panel 1: Risk assessment of the return of the death penalty in Europe

Moderator: Jean-Daniel VIGNY – Member of the International Bureau of FIACAT in charge of relations with the Council of Europe

- Identification of fluctuations in public opinion and speeches calling for the return of the death penalty – Panelist to confirm
- Causes of this threat – Panelist to confirm
- Implications and consequences of the reintroduction of the death penalty in Europe (especially legal implications) - Panelist: Mikhael LOBOV, Head of the Human Rights Policy and Co-operation Department, Council of Europe

10.30-11.30 Panel 2: Fundamentals of the fight against the death penalty and current challenges

Moderator: Cyril Ritchie, President of the Expert Council on NGO Law

- Reminder of the arguments supporting abolition – Panelist: Guillaume COLIN (FIACAT)
- The death penalty, a violation of human rights and particularly of the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment – Panelist: Joao Maria CABRAL, Ambassador of Portugal
- Civil Society and the fight for abolition of the death penalty – Panelist: Rose VINES, Ministry Against the Death Penalty, USA
- Testimony: Panelist to confirm.

11.30-12.30 Panel 3: Tools against the threat of a return of the death penalty in Europe

Moderator to confirm

- Mobilization with other intergovernmental organizations for the promotion and protection of human rights– Video message from Michael O’FLAHERTY, Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency
- Practical approach to human rights education and training – Panelist: Yulia PERERVA
Education for democratic citizenship and human rights - Programme coordinator
- Public awareness of the fight against the death penalty – Panelist: representative of World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

12.30-12.45 Closing remarks

- Matjaz GRUDEN, Director of Policy Planning, Council of Europe
- Anna RURKA, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

13.00-13.30 Inauguration of the exhibition: Draw me the abolition (Together against the death penalty)