



# Launch of the Regular Central European Roundtable

**Prague, April 22, 2024**

**Venue:** Trauttmansdorff Palace, Loretánská 6, 118 00 Prague 1  
**Room:** 315

**Monday, April 22, 2024, from 2pm CET (1pm GMT – 8am EDT)**

- 14:00 – 14:05      **Welcome:**  
Robert Řehák Ph.D., Chair of the IRFBA Alliance  
Fiona Bruce, MP and Vice Chair of the IRFBA Alliance
- 14:05 – 14:40      **Lecture:**  
“AI and Freedom of Religion:” František Štěch, Th.D.
- 14:40 – 15:00      **Discussion**
- 15:00 – 15:05      **Break**
- 15:05 – 15:45      **Short presentations of current activities in**
- Austria: Alexander Rieger (3 min)
  - Croatia: Ivan Picukarić (3 min)
  - Czech Republic: Pavel Svoboda (3 min)
  - Germany: Anke Oppermann (3 min)
  - Hungary: Márk Aurél Érszegi (3 min)
  - Lithuania: Povilas Lazdauskas (3 min)
  - Poland: Pavel Radomski (3 min)
  - Slovakia: Radovan Višnovksý (3 min)
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- Petr Jašek: Growing concerns about the rising persecution of Christians in the world
  - Pavol Bargár: Interfaith Dialogue and FoRB
  - Greg Mitchell: Concept of the local round tables
- 15:45 – 16:00      **Discussion:** “Possible Cooperation in Central Europe”
- 16:00                      **End of the event**
- 16:30 – 17:30        **Guided tour:** Czernin Palace
- 18:00 – 20:00        **Informal Dinner**

**For online participation please use this link:**

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Meeting ID: 310 364 034 367, Passcode: icp6Rf

**Dial-in by phone:** +420 296 849 239..526574152# Czech Republic, Prague, Phone conference ID: 526 574 152#

## **Participants :**

### **Robert Řehák**

Robert Řehák, Ph.D. is Ambassador at Large, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Interfaith Dialogue and Freedom of Religion, Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) – The Article 18 Alliance, Head of the Czech Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), published scholar of biblical proper names and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and official Hebrew interpreter. He served as General Secretary of the Center for Biblical Studies at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (2000-2002), President of the Society of Christians and Jews in the Czech Republic (2000-2005), Cultural and Press Attaché at the Czech Embassy in Israel (2005-2009), Second Secretary of the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C. (2012-2016), and Deputy Spokesperson of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018-2019).

### **Fiona Bruce**

Fiona Bruce has been a member of the UK Parliament for 14 years and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief since 2020. In 2022 Fiona was elected as Chair of the 42-country International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance and was re-elected for a second term in 2023. Fiona is currently Vice Chair of IRFBA- the Article 18 Alliance.

### **František Štěch**

František Štěch, Th.D., currently works as the coordinator of the research group for theology and contemporary culture at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Charles University. Mr. Štěch is also an external collaborator in the Ecumenical Institute and academic associate under grant project. He mainly deals with fundamental and systematic theology. The current subject of his professional interest is the theological interpretation of landscape, cyberspace, artificial intelligence and digital technologies. Mr. Štěch is a member of the European Society for Catholic Theology as well as the member of the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies, among many other.

## **Alexander Rieger**

Minister plenipotentiary Alexander Rieger is Deputy Director of the Department for Scientific Cooperation and Dialogue of Cultures and Religions and the Head of the Task Force Dialogue of Cultures (and Religions) at the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs. His responsibilities include Religion & Foreign Policy, FORB (in close cooperation with the Human Rights Department) and bilateral Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue initiatives. As a 22+ years career diplomat, he has held posts as Deputy Head of Mission in Saudi Arabia, Mexico (incl. Central America) and Iran, where he was additionally the Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum. Alexander Rieger holds a Master in Social and Economical Sciences of the Vienna University of Economics and Business and a Master in International Management of the Community of European Management Schools.

## **Ivan Picukarić**

Ivan Picukarić is currently an Advisor to the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and a Representative of the Republic of Croatia to the IRFBA. As a career diplomat, he had been appointed to several positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He would single out: Chief Inspector of the Ministry, Director for Economic Cooperation as well as Director for Africa and Middle East. Also, he had served as a Consul General in Toronto, Canada (1995-2001), Ambassador to the Republic of South Africa (2006-2010) and Charge d'Affaires to the Republic of Turkiye (2016-2018). He practiced law as a Lawyer before he joined Foreign Service in 1992.

## **Pavel Svoboda**

Pavel Svoboda is a Czech politician and lawyer. From 2007 to 2009 he was Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe. From 2014 to 2019 he was a member of the European Parliament from the Czech Republic for European People's Party representing KDU-ČSL. Subsequently he was elected Chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Legal Affairs and is also a member of the European Parliament Intergroup on Integrity – Transparency, Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime. Currently, Pavel is working as the advisor to Czech Minister for European Affairs.

## **Anke Oppermann**

Anke Oppermann heads the Unit of the Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Frank Schwabe MP at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Previously, she was head of the directorate “Decent work worldwide; food and nutrition security” and the directorate responsible for personnel, organization, legal affairs and the translation and interpreting service, as well as acting head of Directorate-General Z (Central Directorate-General). During her career with the BMZ, Ms. Oppermann also headed the Personnel Division and the Division for Parliament and Cabinet and was Deputy Head of the Minister's Office. She was working in areas such as international human rights, cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Federal College for Security Studies, policy planning and parliamentary work. Anke Oppermann studied History, Public Law and Political Science at universities in Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S.A.

## **Márk Aurél Érszegi**

Márk Aurél Érszegi is the Special Advisor on Religion and Diplomacy at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He has been working for the Hungarian Ministry since 2001, serving in various positions. Most notably, Chief of Staff of the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012-2014). Special Advisor on Religion and Diplomacy in the cabinet of the State Secretary for Information and International Representation of Hungary (2020-2022), and in the Cabinet of the State Secretary for the Aid of Persecuted Christians (since 2022). In 2008-2012 was posted as 2nd Secretary to the Embassy of Hungary in Rome, dealing with EU Affairs and relations with Malta. In 2015-2020 served as 1st Counsellor, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Hungary to the Holy See. He is also known as expert in Vatican affairs, author of several articles on this subject and of the book "Pápa - Szentszék - Vatikán" (The Pope, The Holy See, The Vatican). In addition Márk is a member of Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Circolo S. Pietro. He graduated in International and Diplomatic Sciences from the University of Trieste (Italy) in 1999. Later he studied Theology and Canon Law at the "Pázmány Péter" Catholic University in Budapest (Hungary).

## **Povilas Lazdauskas**

Povilas Lazdauskas works on different thematic and country specific human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, United Nations, International Organizations and Human Rights Department, Human Rights Division. He is a representative of Lithuania in the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA). Previously served as a Human Rights Expert at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva where he worked with the Lithuania's membership at the UN Human Rights Council.

## **Pawel Radomski**

Pawel Radomski is currently serving as the Director of the UN and Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. In July 2022 he was appointed the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland for Freedom of Religion. Pawel Radomski has been working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1995 in various positions. Prior to his current appointment he was the Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations in New York (2014-2020) and the Deputy Director of the UN and Human Rights Department at the MFA (2010-2014). Earlier he served also at the Embassy of Poland in Washington, DC (2005 – 2010) and at the Permanent Mission of Poland to the UN in New York (1998-2002). Pawel Radomski graduated from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1992 as well as from the postgraduate studies at the National School of Public Administration in Warsaw in 1995.

## **Radovan Višnovský**

Is currently working as a desk officer at Department of human rights, Ministry of foreign and European affairs of the Slovak Republic. His agenda covers the topics as Freedom of speech and protection of journalists, religious freedom, and implementation reports of the Slovak Republic to human rights conventions.

## **Petr Jašek**

Petr Jašek, a Christian humanitarian worker and Czech national, spent 445 days in a Sudanese prison. After being falsely accused and convicted of espionage and treason, among other charges, he was sentenced to life in prison on Jan. 29, 2017. Petr was pardoned by Sudan's president on Feb. 23. Petr grew up as the child of a Protestant pastor in communist Czechoslovakia. He earned a master's degree in analytical and physical chemistry, with additional post-graduate studies in clinical chemistry, hematology, blood transfusion, health care administration and hospital management. He worked as a hospital administrator for 10 years. Since the early 1990s, Petr has been involved in helping persecuted Christians around the world. In 1992, he co-founded the Czech branch of The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). He began full-time work for the U.S. branch of VOM in 2002, traveling widely to assess the needs of Christians who have been persecuted for their faith. His background in hospital administration was beneficial in overseeing VOM's efforts to provide medical care to Christians injured in attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

## **Pavol Bargár**

Pavol Bargár is assistant professor at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, the Czech Republic. His research interests lie in theology and culture, theological anthropology, mission studies, and interreligious relations. Pavol is a vice-president of the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies (CEEAMS). He also serves on the executive board of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). In addition to numerous articles and book chapters, he is the author of *Narrative, Myth, Transformation: Reflecting Theologically on Contemporary Culture* (Mlýn, 2016) and *Embodied Existence: Our Common Life in God* (Cascade Books, 2023). He edited the volume *The Bible, Christianity, and Culture: Essays in Honor of Prof. Petr Pokorný* (Karolinum Press, 2023).

## **Greg Mitchell**

Greg Mitchell serves as Founder & CEO of IRF Secretariat, a non-governmental organization that was founded as a leadership, administrative, and management mechanism for the FORB movement. With support from Templeton Religion Trust, IRF Secretariat is building a global network of civil society roundtables and is in the middle of a 3-year project that is designed to institutionalize a new approach, centered on cooperative engagement (that respects/protects the other's human dignity and liberty of conscience) and coordination of multi-faith actions. Greg also serves as Co-Chair of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable in Washington, D.C., a multi-faith, inclusive, equal citizenship space that has proven it is possible for faith and belief communities to engage one another cooperatively across their deepest differences and build mutual respect, trust, and reliance while working together to engage governments and advance freedom of thought, conscience, and religion for all.

## **Contact Details**

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