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"The European project is in danger”. This is how I opened our annual report last year. One month later, the UK voted to leave the EU, opening a period of uncertainty and questioning the very purpose of the Union.

My observation unfortunately remains true in 2017 as the threats against our shared democratic values and the fundamental rights we have been fighting for have grown and spread in the past year.

This year, all progressives have witnessed with desolation the fall of the USA into the populist trap. The election of President Trump already had a devastating impact on rights and values that we deeply cherish: solidarity with the most vulnerable, minority rights, women’s bodily integrity and social justice, to mention just a few.

In the meantime, the political and social situation in Europe has not really improved this year. Even though far-right and populist parties are not in power in most countries, they are gaining ground as they increasingly influence mainstream parties and public debate. So far, European institutions – Member States included – have shown their unwillingness or powerlessness to protect Europe as a community of values. They may have failed but the values underpinning the European project must be safeguarded.

The good news is that seeds of hope exist. To mention a few, in Romania, tens of thousands of people demonstrated against the government’s plan to soften anti-corruption laws last January. In the US, the reactivation of the Global Gag Rule by President Trump has triggered a massive mobilisation from several EU countries and progressive groups to protect women’s rights around the world.

Humanists have a role to play to ensure that our values of freedom, equality, solidarity and critical thinking but also peace and global cooperation are protected and promoted further. This year, our team in Brussels has been working at the European level to help reach this objective, advocating for key rights and strengthening alliances.

Our member organisations have not shied away from this challenge either, implementing a tremendous amount of work at home to promote humanist values at school and beyond, to offer people a choice in their life decisions, to denounce discrimination and to campaign for people’s rights and welfare. I would like to warmly thank them for their work and support for EHF’s missions. I am also grateful to our Board and staff for the time and energy they dedicated to further the EHF’s objectives this year.

Today more than ever, I invite everyone to join forces and help us give a new meaning to the European project and work for a brighter future.

Thank you.

Pierre Galand
In January 2017, the humanist movement lost a cherished colleague and friend, Ramon Casha, chair of the Malta Humanist Association and a campaigner of terrific energy, scope and commitment.

Ramon’s contribution to advancing human rights and secularism in Malta is immense. He mobilised actively for separation of church and state, for freedom of expression and against Malta’s actively-used blasphemy laws. The campaign succeeded in 2016 with the abolition of the crime of “vilification of religion”. He supported the introduction of divorce, same-sex unions and emergency contraception, long before such views became mainstream in Malta. Ramon was also active in defending the cause of refugees and local hospices, and he spent his life fighting against homelessness in Malta.

In addition to his broad civil rights work, Ramon co-founded the Malta Humanist Association and contributed greatly to its growth and development. He tirelessly organised events with the MHA to advance humanist and scientific values in the public arena, and championed the introduction of humanist ceremonies, which came to fruition in 2016 with the training of Malta’s first humanist celebrants. Last year, Ramon warmly welcomed European and international humanists in Malta and contributed greatly to make EHF and IHEU General Assemblies and conferences a real success.

Ramon has died but his ideas and all the causes he supported so fruitfully will not. The Ramon Casha Scholarship Fund established in his memory will give opportunity for migrants to acquire key skills. We invite those who wish to continue Ramon’s work to support the Fund.

IN MEMORIAM Ramon Casha

A dedicated activist, a much missed colleague and friend
The European Humanist Federation (EHF) was set up in 1991, and unites more than 60 humanist/secularist organisations from around 20 European countries. Operating out of Brussels, the EHF promotes a secular Europe and opposes religious extremism within European boundaries. The EHF is also strongly committed to democracy, human rights and to defending European equality legislation.

The EHF aims to:
- Achieve separation between religion and the State throughout Europe including at the European Union level.
- Defend freedom of religion or belief which includes the right not to have any religious beliefs as well as the right to change one’s beliefs.
- Defend freedom of thought and expression and oppose laws prohibiting "blasphemy" or "religious insults".
- Promote non-discrimination on all grounds (incl. gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc.).
- Support women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights and the rights of LGBTI1 people.
- Increase the presence of humanists at European and international levels.
- Strengthen the humanist network throughout Europe.

1 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual

What the EHF does:
- Proposes European and international policy change when humanist values are at stake,
- Promotes individual freedoms and opposes the influence of religious conservatism on European policies,
- Works with a large network of associations, including progressive religious organisations which share the same values,
- Supports its member organisations in their diverse activities at the domestic level (e.g. advocacy actions, humanist ceremonies).
Where is the EHF active?

- Official partner in their dialogue with churches and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU)
- Consultant to EU Council, Commission, Parliament and the European External Action Service
- Member of the Advisory Board of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics
- Members of the Civil Society Platform of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency
- Special Consultative Status in the Economic and Social Council
- Committee of Ministers
- Parliamentary Assembly
- Conference of the INGOs

European Union

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

United Nations
Although secularization is a growing reality in Europe, many countries still experience huge influence from established churches, leading to unfair religious privileges in many aspects of public life, such as in the education and tax systems. EHF grassroots organisations challenge these privileges and promote secularism in their own countries while the EHF does it at the European level.

On 24 March 2017, Heads of State and Government of the European Union met with Pope Francis in Rome ahead of the EU Summit dedicated to discuss the future of Europe. The EHF denounced this meeting as a violation of the principle of secularism underpinning the European project and recalled that the EU is committed to equal treatment of all religions and beliefs. The EHF President further commented that looking outside the EU for guidance from a religious leader was a wrong signal sent to the millions of non-Catholic citizens in Europe.
The EHF went further and released its Humanist vision for Europe to mark the 60th anniversary of the Rome treaties in March 2017. This vision proposes an optimistic and inclusive perspective for Europe to tackle the many challenges it is currently facing, to safeguard its model based on the welfare state and public services and to project an ambitious political vision for its future. It is based on core humanist values and promotes—among other things—secularism as the best framework for harmonious coexistence of all life stances.2

Promoting secularism and challenging religious privileges was also undertaken at national level.

In Sweden, the opening of the Parliamentary session usually begins with a religious ceremony attended by the Prime Minister, his cabinet and MPs. This year for the first time, the secular ceremony organized by Humanisterna was mentioned alongside the church service on the official program. This event had been running for five years now, but was finally given official recognition and has seen growing success, with the attendance of more than twenty MPs and three ministers in September 2016.

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In France, the government allowed this year nativity scenes to be displayed in State and public buildings such as town halls and therefore went against the principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution. Our member Union des Familles Laïques (UFAL) campaigned to denounce this violation of the Constitution.

In Belgium, the Centre d’Action Laïque reframed its core value of secularism and advocated for its inclusion in the Belgian constitution. It is now understood as the humanist principle which builds a system of freedoms and human rights upon the impartiality of the democratic public authorities that are free from any religious interference. This principle obliges the rule of law to insure equality, solidarity and emancipation of citizens through the diffusion of knowledge and the practice of free inquiry.

In the United Kingdom, the National Secular Society (NSS) launched a major new report, “Rethinking religion and belief in public life”, which was sent to MPs, setting out their proposed reforms to secularise the UK’s constitutional system, defend human rights and promote a secular education system.

“No to integrisms! Let’s preserve the neutrality of the public space!” Credit: UFAL.
CAMPAIGNING FOR A FAIR
and inclusive education system

Several of our members challenge religious privileges at school and campaign for public education systems to be more inclusive, balanced, pluralistic, and that contribute to mutual understanding between people of all religions and none.

In the United Kingdom, major actions were undertaken by our members against “faith schools” or “schools with a religious character” as they are named officially. Around a third of all state-funded schools in England and Wales are faith schools and this number has grown in recent years as successive governments have increased the influence of religious groups in the state-funded education system. Following the Government’s announcement to introduce a new generation of state schools that can religiously discriminate against children for 100% of their places, the British Humanist Association (BHA) and the NSS increased their action to denounce and challenge this system. The North
East Humanists contributed to the BHA “No Faith Schools” campaign by raising money.

Moreover, the BHA continued to lead a campaign for greater action on the problem of illegal religious schools in the UK. Despite the existence of such schools being well-known to various responsible authorities, the thousands of children trapped within them continue to receive an “education” characterized by indoctrination, physical abuse, and the rote learning of scripture to the exclusion of almost all “secular” learning in subjects such as English, Science, and Maths. In response to this campaign, the UK Government launched a consultation on measures to crackdown on unregistered schools, and various local authorities made similar calls or launched similar consultations throughout the year.

During the summer of 2016, the BHA also launched a new whistleblowing and blogging website called “Faith Schoolers Anonymous” designed to highlight the experiences of young people in some of the UK’s most problematic religious schools. The NSS also publicised instances of unregistered (and illegal) religious schools neglecting children’s rights and pressed state agencies to act to close these institutions.

Fighting for inclusive public schools was also undertaken by the CAL in Belgium with a major campaign to replace the system of two compulsory hours of either ethics or religion classes by one common philosophy and civil rights class that all pupils would attend regardless of their beliefs. Religious and ethics classes would remain optional. The government did not go as far as CAL’s proposal but agreed to dedicate one hour to that teaching, with another one remaining in the old system, i.e. where children choose between ethics or religion classes. CAL will continue to advocate for two hours of common classes.

In France, the Ligue de l’Enseignement worked to promote the universal right to education across the world with the campaign “No Education, No Future” which aims at supporting local micro-projects to provide access to school for every child worldwide. The projects were run by the Ligue’s network of member organisations and targeted more specifically schools in Western Africa. The campaign was renewed in the beginning of 2017 and successfully funded three projects to renovate or build classrooms in schools in Benin and Burkina Faso.
DEFENDING FREEDOM of religion or belief

Many threats, violence and discrimination hit non-believers and opponents of religious extremism worldwide. The EHF denounces these persecutions and campaigns for the protection of non-believers’ rights, in close collaboration with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

The EHF team in Brussels worked on two European Parliament reports assessing fundamental rights within and outside the European Union in 2015 and proposing recommendations to improve their protection. As they were originally drafted, both texts were very poor on a wide range of issues. As regards freedom of religion or beliefs outside the EU, the texts barely mentioned the discrimination and persecution suffered by non-believers, atheists and agnostics, focussing mainly on the situation of Christian minorities. The EHF worked closely with other NGOs to improve the texts. We successfully managed to get included the need to protect non-believers’ rights inside and outside the EU and the need for clear protection of the freedom not to believe, as well as other key rights, like sexual rights and LGBTI rights.

3 These discriminations and threats are very well reported and detailed in the 2016 Freedom of Thought Report issued by the International Humanist and Ethical Union available at http://freethoughtreport.com/
Similar advocacy of non-believers’ rights was also undertaken beyond the EU, at the UN level during the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council (July 2016). The EHF joined a coalition of 14 NGOs to request the creation of an international independent commission to investigate the murders of at least nine secularist and humanist Bangladeshi intellectuals in 2015 and 2016. The unprecedented wave of violence that has hit free-thinkers in Bangladesh was largely ignored by the Government, which left targeted thinkers and activists in great danger and unprotected. Besides this political advocacy work, the EHF network of organisations continued to mobilise this year to help relocate Bangladeshis under threat. The UFAL (France) was particularly active in raising money to help threatened families.

In the UK, the BHA also initiated an exciting community project at the end of 2016, to support ex-religious people and "apostates" through a formal programme called "Faith to Faithless". It aims at ensuring that threatened groups such as ex-Muslims, ex-Orthodox Jews, and ex-Jehovah’s Witnesses are supported to live confidently and free from abuse. The programme will also support organisations that provide services, like homeless shelters, refuge centres from abuse, and mainstream counselling services, by providing training to ensure their services take into account the specific needs of "apostates".
In the Netherlands, Humanistisch Verbond worked to raise awareness on the situation of non-believers in the country, by launching a new documentary “Non-believers, Freethinkers on the Run” that is a sequel to last year’s documentary “Among Non-believers”. The main focus of the documentary is the situation of atheists in Dutch asylum centres where they seem to be subject to similar threats to those that led them to flee their own countries.

In Sweden, Humanisterna organised lectures and campaigned to raise awareness of the situation of child refugees and more specifically of the issues of child marriage in Sweden and “honour”-related violence. This work followed the organisation of a charity gala in 2015 to raise money for child refugees in northern Iraq. In Iceland, part of the work of Sidmennt was dedicated to raising awareness on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers too. The humanist association awarded Thorunn Olafsdottir, the founder of Akkeri, an NGO working with refugees in the Mediterranean area, its 2016 Humanist Award. Sidmennt also granted substantial funds to UNICEF for their project with children in Syria.
CAMPAIGNING FOR FREE SPEECH and against blasphemy laws

Humanists strongly advocate for free speech and combat religious threats to this fundamental right. While the right to freedom of religion or belief must be protected, it is equally important to guarantee an environment in which a critical discussion about religion can be held.

**Defending free speech**

In 2016, the EHF addressed a specific case of blatant violation of free speech by supporting the leading Hungarian opposition newspaper *Népszabadság* that was brutally shut down by its publisher. While financial reasons were officially announced to justify the closure, suspicious meetings between the newspaper owner and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán have shown that political motives were clearly the origin of the affair.

In an act of solidarity, the EHF organized a set of meetings in Brussels where journalists from *Népszabadság* met Members of the European Parliament on the occasion of the 2016 Annual European Colloquium on Fundamental Rights dedicated to media pluralism. This helped raise awareness of EU decision makers about the precarious situation of the media in Hungary and show support for the journalists and for freedom of the press at large.
In Russia, much of the Russian Humanist Society (RHS)’s work on social networks was devoted this year to solidarity with free thinkers and against religious extremism. In a 2016 statement "For a humane and democratic Russia", the RHS expressed its solidarity with civil society activists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens who are in prison or under investigation, persecuted for expressing an opinion and for taking part in demonstrations. This statement also included the organisation’s position against the ideology of “traditional values” that has been used to justify domestic violence, contravene women’s reproductive rights, and support homophbic behaviour by criminalizing LGBTI people.

In Iceland, freedom of speech was also discussed this year, at a conference organized by Sidmennt. The theme of the event “Do you have to say everything you can say? What are the limits of freedom of expression in schools?” arose from widespread discussion triggered by a ruling by Iceland’s Supreme Court that a teacher who is a fundamentalist Christian may refer to homosexuality in negative ways as well as calling it a deadly sin. This event was the opportunity to discuss the line between freedom of expression and hate speech.

In the United Kingdom, the NSS honoured the legacy of Charlie Hebdo by organizing an event in Parliament in January 2017. The panel brought together strong supporters of free speech such as the French journalist and writer Caroline Fourest who had helped edit the “Survivor’s Edition” of Charlie Hebdo published shortly after the massacre. Participants discussed the future of free speech and threats to it in the UK, including those from misguided new Government legislation intended to silence individuals and organisations that it deems to be “extreme”.

4 The teacher was accused of using his private blog for hate speech against LGBTI people. He was sacked because he had not been careful/respectful in his statements about LGBTI people and had expressed strong religiously fundamentalist negative opinions about them.
News from the blasphemy front

There was some good news from France this year on blasphemy laws. Following Norway, Iceland and Malta, after strong lobbying of MPs by our member Égalité, Laïcité, Europe (EGALE), France finally repealed the blasphemy law that had applied in the Alsace-Moselle region.

Good news of decriminalization of blasphemy is too rare not to be officially highlighted. During the United Nations human rights review of Iceland at the Human Rights Council in March 2016, the EHF joined its colleagues from the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) and Sidmennt to praise Iceland for having abolished its blasphemy law in 2015 and for providing an example of good practice to other states.

In 2016, the Humanist Union of Greece (HUG) coordinated a joint NGO submission with the EHF and the IHEU to the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) calling for an end to blasphemy laws in Greece. Three international and 51 national NGOs signed it. Reacting to this initiative in a public statement, the Minister of Justice announced his intent to decriminalize blasphemy as nowadays the concept of such a crime is so vague. After its review of Greece in August 2016, the CERD included a recommendation that Greece abolishes articles 198 and 199 on blasphemy from its Criminal Code. Moreover, throughout 2016, along with the Greek Helsinki Monitor, the Humanist Union of Greece recorded and complained to the prosecutor about scores of racist crimes (racist speech, racist violence, racist discrimination, racist profiling).5

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5 Available on https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com
DEFENDING WOMEN’S RIGHTS in Europe

Humanists believe that all people should be equally valued for who they are. That they should be free and able to make their own decisions on how to live and conduct their own lives. This includes women having the right of choice in their sexual and reproductive lives, and everyone being able to live free from discrimination on all grounds.

At the EU level, extremist religious groups work continuously to oppose these rights and to frame the debate in a very conservative direction. The crusade launched by President Trump against women’s and minorities’ rights has only strengthened the confidence of these groups at the European level. Against this background, the EHF reinforced its advocacy work to ensure that a majority of decision-makers remains convinced of the necessity to protect sexual and reproductive health and rights and non-discrimination.
High Ground, the Alliance for Choice and Dignity in Europe

Since 2012, the EHF has worked closely but informally with five other progressive NGOs active in the field of human rights⁶, and especially, women’s rights, sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR), LGBTI rights and secularism. These organisations are mostly Brussels-based but also include Catholics for Choice in the US.

In June 2016, the EHF and its five partners officially launched the High Ground platform at the European Parliament with a private event for friendly decision makers, NGOs representatives and political advisers. The meeting aimed at presenting the work of the platform: equipping decision-makers with expertise and argumentation via training and briefings to oppose conservative-led extremist religious lobbies. The meeting was a real success and paved the way for constructive work with progressive MEPs and advisers in the following months.

In December 2016, the EHF was invited with one of its partner organisations to present this collaborative work at the French National Assembly. The invitation came from the French Family Planning organisation and a S&D Member of the French Parliament. The conference discussed the global movement against reproductive and sexual rights led by several churches and religious organisations and the need for NGOs to engage in intersectional work to defend our threatened progressive values and rights. This work was followed by a training session in February 2017 given by the EHF and its partner EPF⁷ to French NGOs in anticipation of the presidential and legislative elections in France. We brought together humanist, women’s rights and LGBTI’s rights organisations around the table and discussed potential

SRHR in brief

Sexual and Reproductive Health is the ability to have a safe and satisfying sex life and the ability to reproduce.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights include the right to make decisions about one’s sexual and reproductive health, including the choice to marry and determine the number, timing and spacing of children. They also include the right to have access to healthcare services.

6  Catholics for Choice (CFC), European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), European Region of the International LGBTI Association (ILGA-Europe), European Women’s Lobby (EWL), International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network (IPPF-EN).

7  European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development
joint strategies to monitor candidates’ programmes and ensure mobilisation in case of conservative or far-right candidates winning the elections.

The EHF engaged in similar training and advocacy work by contributing to seminars organised at the European Parliament on two sensitive issues. In September 2016, the EHF co-organised a conference on conscientious objection with different political groups and the All of Us Alliance. EHF Executive Director Pierre-Arnaud Perrouty recalled that this specific issue of conscientious objection had been hijacked for a long time by people wanting “religious freedom” to prevail over other rights, and especially SRHR, LGBTI rights and the right to die with dignity. Their objective – which is also the Vatican’s official strategy – is to encourage medical institutions and practitioners to refuse to perform legal abortions or deliver contraception on the ground of freedom of conscience. In countries like Italy, this strategy has led to a dramatic situation where over 70% of gynaecologists and practitioners now refuse to perform abortion. The EHF then reminded the audience that European law and jurisprudence do not recognize a general right to conscientious objection in medical healthcare, contrary to anti-choice activists’ claims. This meeting was a successful opportunity to address misleading arguments and set the record straight on this specific issue.

The EHF was also invited to discuss at the European Parliament the issue of “human dignity” which is increasingly used by conservative policy makers to oppose any progress on SRHR. The objective of this meeting was to equip friendly policy makers and advisers with legal and ethical argumentation to reclaim human dignity and to promote a progressive reading that includes women’s right to health, the right

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8 All of Us is an alliance of several European Parliament political groups (S&D, GUE/NGL and the Greens/EFA) mobilised within the European Parliament to defend sexual and reproductive health and rights.
and freedom to make choices over one’s body and one’s own life and death.

The EHF also intervened on the same issue at the Institute for European Studies of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in December 2016 in a panel that included Christian organisations with a narrow view of human dignity (from the moment of conception to the natural death) and secular organisations with an inclusive and humanist view of the concept.

**At national level**

Our member organisations also campaigned for women’s rights at home this year, through a wide range of actions including advocacy work, street actions and media campaigns.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the BHA worked to challenge the abortion ban in Northern Ireland, claiming that it violated women’s human rights, and took part as interveners in a court case to try and change the law. They made several submissions to the United Nations (UN) which had an impact on the public affairs landscape in Britain. The BHA submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child led to the UK being rebuked by the UN for not making sex and relationships education compulsory and for the ban on abortion in Northern Ireland. In addition, the BHA was one of the main groups in the UK campaigning for LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships education.

In France, our member Égalité, Laïcité, Europe (EGALE) successfully advocated for sexism to be recognised as an aggravating circumstance in
discrimination, as in racist and homophobic crimes. Their proposal was endorsed by the Delegation for Women’s Rights, as was EGALE’s recommendation to include non-discrimination on basis of gender in the French constitution.

In Belgium, the Centre d’Action Laïque (CAL) and DeMens.nu worked hand in hand to implement the major campaign “IVG hors du Code pénal” to remove abortion from the penal code and make it a full right for women. Even though it was partially decriminalized in 1990, abortion is still described as a “crime against public order and family morality” in the Belgian law. The campaign was launched in 2015 and both organisations increased their communication and advocacy efforts this year. Besides press articles, participation in TV and radio shows and debates, they organised two major meetings. The first main conference was held in September 2016 with practitioners and researchers to gather expertise from the medical and legal worlds. This event, attended by more than 200 people, was followed by a conference with Belgian, French and Luxembourg MPs in January 2017 at the Belgian Senate. As a result of these meetings, three Belgian political parties proposed bills to remove abortion from the penal code. The campaign will continue this year in the hope of final success.

DeMens.nu further drew attention to women’s rights with a four-day campaign named “Veelzijdig” in March 2016 focusing on gender equality, women’s living conditions and emancipation. The project took the form of a glass tent in Leuven where passers-by could easily stop and join the events, e.g., workshops, street theatre and performances.
Europe is in bad shape and has had a lot of serious issues to deal with recently. The EHF has been particularly concerned with the very harsh EU position on asylum-seekers and the weakening of democratic principles across Europe. In this difficult political and social context, we discussed European orientations with EU institutions and strengthened alliances with NGOs sharing our concerns about the state of Europe.

Part of this discussion took place with leaders of the European Union (EU) in the framework of Article 17 of the TFEU which requires EU institutions to conduct an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and non-confessional organizations.

The EHF was invited in June 2016 by the European Commission to give its input on three specific issues: the reception conditions of refugees in Europe, the fight against extremism and the role of the youth in the creation of a new European vision. The EHF President, Pierre Galand, took the floor to regret the lack of coherence in the EU’s positions and actions which has contributed to blurring its overall objective and making the European project unpopular with a number of people. He recalled the political move undertaken by EU institutions to address the violations of fundamental rights in Poland and their lack of willingness to address similar threats in Hungary. The Centre d’Action Laïque Liège (Belgium) gave a presentation about its work in the field to rebuild social bonds between communities, to promote active and responsible citizenship and to manage social diversity in a region hit by poverty and unemployment.
The same month, the EHF had further discussions with the European Commission on the issue of migration and integration and more specifically on how to put into practice the European values of solidarity and protection of minorities. EHF members from Croatia (the Center for Civil Courage), from Poland (the Polish Humanist Association) and from Germany (Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands – HVD) also contributed to the meeting. The EHF President promoted secularism as the best guarantee for Member States to truly respect freedom of religion or belief and urged the Commission and other EU institutions to undertake a radical change in their policy regarding asylum seekers coming to Europe. He went on to discuss integration policies, highlighting the Maltese model which involves local people alongside refugees in the integration process in order for everyone to better understand each other’s culture.

Migration and integration policies were also discussed with the Malta Presidency of the Council of the European Union in a very constructive meeting with the Maltese Prime Minister and the Malta Humanist Association in Valletta in January 2017. In particular, the EHF urged the Malta presidency to address the humanitarian crisis that had hit asylum-seekers and migrants, to proceed faster with relocation and to open safe legal routes into Europe. We also encouraged the Presidency to promote the decriminalisation of “blasphemy” and “religious insult” in all EU Member States. The Malta Humanist Association took the opportunity of this meeting to request the start of official discussions on legalising euthanasia in Malta.

The EHF also highlighted the increasing violation of the rule of law and fundamental rights in Europe at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in September 2016. The EHF representative from the Polish Humanist Association specifically requested the OSCE to launch the “Moscow Mechanism” to monitor the situation in Poland which has been drifting away from democracy since last elections in 2015.

The current state of democracy and human rights in Europe was also discussed at an informal level with civil society organisations. In October 2016, the EHF joined our member Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (HVD) in Nuremberg, Germany, to discuss the rise of far right populism in Europe. The EHF reported on the challenges met during
the 2016 “Wake up Europe” campaign and discussed other possible ways for humanists to counter the rise of far-right populism. Any action would need to take account of challenges including public debate focused on the “crisis”, fragmentation of national and European public opinion and the difficulty of addressing complex issues with simple messages.

This brainstorming process continued with the French NGO Sauvons l’Europe (Save Europe) which invited the EHF to Paris last November to discuss how Europeans could mobilise to protect and advance human rights and liberties at a time where conservatism and “traditional values” were gaining traction. This issue that was also discussed within the framework of the platform Civil Society Europe of which the EHF has been a member since 2015. The overall objective of the platform is to strengthen the links between civil society organisations in their advocacy work with the EU institutions but this year it particularly focused on the issue of the shrinking space for civil society organisations across Europe. This is a problem that is quite noticeable in several countries like Hungary, Poland or Romania but that has been happening also in France and the UK in the follow-up to terrorist attacks. In collaboration with CIVICUS, Civil Society Europe launched a survey of its member organisations and issued a report to which the EHF contributed – specifically on the case of Hungary. The report aims at becoming an evidence-based tool for advocacy at the European institutions.
In these troubled times, humanist values of openness, non-discrimination, responsibility, freedom of choice, rational and critical thinking are more needed than ever. Our grassroots national organisations work hard to promote these values.

EHF member organisations have nourished key political and social debates on various issues – religion, science, freedom of expression, refugees and migrants, human rights violations and terrorism – with a humanistic point of view, by running blogs, organising debates and exhibitions and issuing magazines.

In Poland, the Polish Rationalists (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Racjonalistów) and the German free-thinkers (Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften) organised a conference in October 2016 on the contribution of free-thinkers to the construction of multiculturalism in Wrocław. One of the most important centres of secular life in Germany during the 19th and 20th centuries, Wroclaw is today a very liberal city but also the home of the most significant nationalist movement in Poland. The EHF supported the event and talked about the importance of secularism and human rights in the building of a European identity.
In France too, our member the Union des Familles Laïques (UFAL) was very active in promoting humanist and secularist values, especially towards young people, by organising the exhibition "Laïcité, tout simplement" that was presented in many schools and cities across France. An educational quiz was created alongside the exhibition to help children understand and remember the main concepts of secularism and humanism.

The UFAL also organized a "Secularism Week" in December 2016 to mark the anniversary of the French legislation on separation between religion and politics. About 30 events – a conference, exhibitions, showings of films – were organized throughout the country.

This work to promote humanism and laïcité in France was also undertaken by our member Égalité Laïcité Europe who published the second edition of their Dictionary of Secularism (Dictionnaire de la Laïcité).

In France, the Ligue de l’Enseignement worked more specifically on the issue of solidarity with the campaign "Let’s play the solidarity card" which distributed postcards to schools in France with photos from different French artists denouncing racial and social discrimination. On the International Day against Racism, about 150 000 of these postcards were sent by pupils to random people throughout the country. The campaign came with educational tools to open up debate and questioning among younger citizens at school.
In Spain, the humanist movement has been growing this year with the creation of the Associació per a l’humanisme, that worked to spread humanism in the country not only through social media and YouTube but also with a conference “Where do we come from and where are we going?” led by Ivan Martí-Vidal, a prominent astronomer. The new organization has already been very active in contacting atheist, skeptic, and secularist groups and in establishing cooperative projects like the first International Mortals Meeting that will be held in May 2017.

This theme of mortality was also undertaken in a very vivid way by Humanistisch Verbond (HV) in the Netherlands with the exhibition "Once in a Lifetime" where eight artists shed light on various aspects of life and mortality and explored the themes of time, memories and the traces we leave. Alongside the exhibition, HV organised workshops, guided tours and lectures which were attended by more than 40,000 people. HV also organized 40 humanist courses throughout the country for members and non-members, like "Introduction to humanism" and two different humanist philosophy courses on the "Classical" and the "Modern Art of Living", reaching more than 350 potential new members. This work was backed up by 40 local humanist groups who organized lectures, reading groups, film and debate events and social projects.

In the United Kingdom, many events and campaigns were organized by several of our members to help introduce humanism to new audiences. On 12 February 2016, the BHA and the Central London Humanists celebrated "Darwin Day" with respectively a lecture attended by more than 1300 people and a comedy night "Stand Up For Darwin 2017" that raised money for the BHA. The BHA also held its largest ever Holyoake Lecture in Manchester where speaker Owen Jones spoke about humanism as an antidote to rising fascism and populism in 2016.

9 www.apalhu.org
On social media, the BHA’s "Simply Humanism" campaign reached millions of people online with quotes from famous names providing simple introductions to their humanist values. The BHA also strengthened humanist activity in Wales and Northern Ireland with the launch of two national sections: Wales Humanists and Northern Ireland Humanists. Both have attracted many supporters and have quickly become a presence in their national media landscapes.

Humanism was also promoted in North East England with monthly talks organized by the North East Humanists (NEH), featuring for example ex-Muslim atheist Aliyah Saleem, a secular education campaigner and a co-founder of "Faith to Faithless". NEH also runs a scheme whereby schools can invite a speaker to come along to explain Humanist beliefs and values to students.

The National Secular Society (NSS) chose to celebrate their 150th anniversary with a major conference around the theme of "Living Better Together". To mark the occasion, they also commissioned a portrait bust of NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh, which is now on display to the public in the Palace of Westminster.
In Autumn 2016, the Swedish Humanist Association (Humanisterna), the Danish Humanist Society (Humanistisk Samfund), the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association (Síðmennt), the Finnish humanists (Suomen Humanistiliitto), the Finnish free thinkers (Vapaa-ajattelijain Liitto), and the Norwegian Humanist Association (Human-Etisk Forbund) adopted the Nordic Humanist Manifesto \(^{11}\) – a formulation of the common world view of the Nordic humanist organizations. This Nordic definition of humanism as a life stance was officially presented during the Nordic conference on freedom of religion and thought in March 2016 in Helsinki. The EHF was happy to contribute to the conference and to strengthen links with its Nordic members.

In Romania, humanism spread on the web after the creation of a new humanist blog \(^{12}\) run by the Romanian Humanist Association (Asociația Umanistă Română) and the Romanian Secular–Humanist Association (Asociația Secular–Umanistă din România – ASUR) which got together a team of writers and editors around humanist issues.

In October 2016, both organisations also organized the first session of a humanist parenting workshop for parents of young children. The workshop was called “How do we talk to children about humanism?” and it was meant to find ways to address issues such as human rights, the importance of science, religion, democracy and ethics when talking to children.

In Russia, part of the work of the Russian Humanist Society (RHS, Российское Гуманистическое Общество) was directed to raising awareness of science and pseudoscience. In October 2016 the RHS held a conference dedicated to the memory of Vitaly Ginzburg, a Russian theoretical physicist, astrophysicist, Nobel laureate and one of the founders of the humanist organisation. In February 2017, the RHA supported the manifesto on “The pseudoscientific essence of homeopathy” issued by the committee against pseudoscience and falsification of scientific research under the presidium of Russian Academy of Sciences. This document had an unprecedented public impact. Dr. Valerii Kuvakin, ex-President and founder of the RHS, co-authored the manifesto and was invited to take part in numerous talk-shows on federal TV channels.

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\(^{11}\) Available on https://human.no
\(^{12}\) umanismromania.ro/blog
Through diverse activities, EHF members promote humanist values towards young people – be they members of humanist groups or not.

At the invitation of the ALDE (Liberals) group, the EHF contributed to a training for European young people at the European Parliament in Brussels. In December 2016, we discussed with about 40 young people the role and place of religion and secularism in Europe and within EU institutions. The EHF gave another presentation at the European Parliament in February 2017 about the growing opposition to gender equality in Europe in the framework of the Youth for Gender Equality Forum organised by the Socialists and Democrats group. This was followed by a very constructive role play that helped participants sharpen their argumentation to promote gender equality in their home country.

In Romania, the Romanian Humanist Association and the Romanian Secular-Humanist Association organised in August 2016 the very first Romanian Humanist Camp, held in the Carpathian Mountains. They hosted more than 30 participants aged 18-23 who learnt from nine speakers about humanism and human rights, ethical dilemmas and the importance of science in life, and how...
to deal with prejudice against ethnic or sexual minorities. The camp also included humanist movie nights, sports and games, visits to nearby tourist attractions, but most importantly it brought together people from different cities and different interests who were eager to learn and debate about humanist issues.

A similar humanist summer camp was organised in France by the Union des Familles Laïques to promote humanist values such as solidarity, freedom of conscience and secularism to young people between the ages of 13 and 18.

In the United Kingdom, the BHA “Youth Humanists” group had a successful year of events around the country, stimulating humanist engagement and bringing new members into the BHA. In addition, the BHA section for university students (“Atheist, Humanist, and Secular Students”) held an impressively large annual conference in the spring and grew in size as several new campus-based humanist societies were founded.

In Belgium, our member DeMens.nu gave strong support to the young humanist movement by helping set up the “Week of the Enlightenment” organised by the Free University of Brussels (VUB) in March 2016 and by supporting the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation. Belgian Dutch-speaking humanist students also participated in the European Youth Parliament, and in the London International Model United Nations (team “Vubmun”) where they could enrol as ambassadors in political simulations.

In the French-speaking part of Belgium, the Brussels section of the Centre d’Action Laïque was active with young people by, for instance, organising a ceremony to mark the passage from childhood to adolescence in May 2016 in Brussels. This event brought together about 450 pupils aged 10-12 and was included workshops and creative activities (acting, video, dance, writing) to brainstorm about ideas of autonomy, freedom of conscience, ethics and political and social commitments.
Many of our member organisations throughout Europe are also active in providing humanist counselling (in prisons, hospitals, retirement homes, youth centres and the army) and ceremonies to mark major life events in a meaningful and non-religious way (baby naming, coming of age, wedding and funerals). The popularity of such non-confessional services keeps growing in Europe where more and more people declare themselves non-believers or non-practitioners.

In the United Kingdom, the BHA launched a new animated video featuring Stephen Fry to promote humanist funerals, weddings, and namings, along with new poll that shows that 1 in 7 people in the UK want a humanist funeral when they die. The BHA’s network of celebrants across the country continued to grow steadily in 2016, and the year ended with over 120 trained pastoral carers operating in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The BHA also established a professional body for these volunteers, the “Non-Religious Pastoral Care Network”, two members of which made history by becoming the first paid humanists in the UK to offer pastoral support, one in a hospital and the other in a university. The BHA at length became the first ever non-religious provider to be accepted as part of a National Health Service chaplaincy body. The offer of humanist services further extended this year in England with two North East Humanists members becoming volunteer pastoral support workers, one in a prison and one in a hospital.

In Scotland, a new provision approved by the Scottish Parliament in February 2017 officially recognised the Humanist Society Scotland (HSS) as the first non-religious organisation to be “prescribed” under the 1977 Marriage Act. HSS was responsible for securing a change in 2005 to allow Scotland to become the first part
of the UK to allow legal Humanist wedding ceremonies. This significant change to the marriage landscape in Scotland means that HSS is given recognition as Scotland’s national Humanist charity.

Since 1989 Sidmennt has been offering a secular confirmation educational programme and ceremonies for teenagers in Iceland. Currently 9% of 13 year-old Icelanders participate in the programme. Since 2008 Sidmennt has also offered other secular and humanist ceremonies such as baby namings, weddings and funerals. At first these were not well known but after Sidmennt became the first registered secular life stance organization in Iceland in 2013 and their marriage ceremonies became legal, the popularity and demand for secular ceremonies has increased enormously. In June 2016, a total of 2,947 Icelandic teenagers had participated in Sidmennt’s civil confirmation and 36,500 guests had attended the ceremonies over the 28 years since it began, with about 13,000 in 2016 (out of a population of 330,000).

There was good news for ceremonies in Spain too: the offer of humanist ceremonies developed in the Valencia and Alicante regions thanks for the dynamism of two humanist celebrants who have been the first official providers of humanist ceremonies in Spain (weddings, funerals and renewals of vows). In the region of Murcia, a group of humanists affiliated to the BHA – Humanists of Murcia – also provided ceremonies. Furthermore, this year, several towns reported that the number of civil weddings exceeded those of traditional church Catholic weddings.

In Belgium, several humanist educators and celebrants from Germany, England and Belgium met this year in Antwerp at the invitation of the European Humanist Professionals to discuss specifically humanist education. There is great diversity of lifestance education in the different European countries (regarding the scope of the syllabus, pedagogical approach, school administrative structures, parental and pupils’ rights and options) and the EHP offered a platform to connect and share best practice. As regards ceremonies in Belgium, the offer continued to grow in the Dutch speaking part with a total of approximately 1,800 ceremonies performed by DeMens.nu this year. The demand for humanist funerals grew particularly in the Luxembourg province as well as for baby naming ceremonies.
The EHF has member organisations throughout Europe. Some have been created fairly recently, while others are over two centuries old. There are federations comprised of millions of members, and local groups with only a few dozen. Some work at grass roots level dealing with social issues, humanist ceremonies, counselling, leisure activities, and education, and others are more interested in reflection, personal fulfilment or philosophical enquiry. Again, some are particularly active in campaigning for a secular state or to promote a non-religious life stance. Many EHF members are umbrella organisations with member organisations of their own, that are not necessarily directly affiliated to the EHF.
EUROPE
European Humanist Professionals

AUSTRIA
Freidenkerbund Österreichs

BELGIUM
CAVA - Centrum voor Vrijzinnig Humanistische Erfgoed
Centre d’Action Laïque
deMens.nu
Fédération Européenne des Maisons de la Laïcité
Humanistisch Vrijzinnige Vereniging
Raad voor Inspectie en Begeleiding niet-confessionele Zedenleer
Vrijzinnig Trefpunt

CROATIA
Center for Civil Courage

DENMARK
Ateistisk Selskab
Humanistisk Samfund

FINLAND
Humanist Union of Finland
Vapaa-ajattelijain liitto ry

FRANCE
Cercle Gaston-Crémieux
Egalité Laïcité Europe (EGALE)
La Ligue de l’Enseignement
Mouvement Europe et Laïcité
Union des Familles Laïques
Union Rationaliste

GERMANY
Bund Freireligiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands
Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften
Giordano Bruno Stiftung
Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands

GREECE
Atheist Union of Greece
Delphi Society
Humanist Union of Greece

ICELAND
Sidmennt

IRELAND
Humanist Association of Ireland

ITALY
Associazione del Libero Pensiero “Giordano Bruno”
Coordinamento Nazionale delle Consulte per la Laicità delle Istituzioni
Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti

LUXEMBOURG
Allianz vun Humanisten, Atheisten an Agnostiker Lëtzebuerg

MALTA
Malta Humanist Association

NETHERLANDS
Humanist Historical Center
Humanistisch Vormingsonderwijs
Stichting HSHB
Humanistisch Verbond

NORWAY
Human-Etisk Forbund

POLAND
Polish Humanist Association
Polish Rationalist Association

PORTUGAL
Humanismo Secular Portugal

ROMANIA
Asociația Umanistă Română
Fundatia Centrul Pentru Conștienta Critica
Romanian Secular-Humanist Association

RUSSIA
ATOM - Moscow Atheist Society
Good Sense
Russian Humanist Society

SLOVAKIA
Prometheus Society of Slovakia
Etika Tolerancia Humanizmus
Občianstvo Sekularizmus

SPAIN
Europa Laica
Fundacion Ferrer i Guardia

SWEDEN
Humanisterna

SWITZERLAND
Freidenker-Vereinigung der Schweiz FVS/ASLP

UNITED KINGDOM
British Humanist Association
Central London Humanist Group
Galha - LGBT Humanists
Humanist Society of Scotland
National Secular Society
North East Humanists
Conway Hall Ethical Society
South West London Humanists
You too can play a role in the promotion and defence of humanist values and human rights! If you want to help the EHF continue its work, please donate at

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The European Humanist Federation is the largest umbrella organisation of humanist associations in Europe, promoting a secular Europe and fundamental rights, defending equal treatment of everyone regardless of religion or belief, and fighting religious conservatism and privilege in Europe.

www.humanistfederation.eu

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