

ELF HUB at Freedom Games 2019

September 13-15, 2019 // Lodz, Poland

SHORT REPORT

On September 13-15, 2019, for the first time in the history of Freedom Games – a prestigious annual interdisciplinary forum of ideas held in Lodz, Poland, ELF HUB – a unique series of debates under the banner of European Liberal Forum, was organized. Throughout two and a half days, altogether ten sessions took place, covering a wide range of diverse topics, each with a unique link to the past, present, and future of the European community and the world.

The 6th edition of the forum titled “How Do Democracies Win?” gathered in Lodz leaders and renowned thinkers and engaged them in a debate on the most important challenges that local and global communities must face in the 21st century. The event hosted in Atlas Arena, a large-scale concert hall and conference venue, 3,804 participants, with a large proportion attending the ELF HUB sessions. All ELF HUB events were equipped with simultaneous translation in order to offer the audiences the access to the insights of and remarks made by English-speaking guests.

Out of all 284 guests from Poland and abroad – with activists, NGO representatives, European Commissioners, MEPs, MPs, politicians, scholars, authors, high-profile filmmakers, journalists, economists, among others, – 43 speakers joined the ELF HUB sessions, thus amounting to approximately one-sixth of all Freedom Games panelists.

During the Opening Night Gala on Friday, September 13, with the patronage of European Liberal Forum, several high-profile individuals introduced the attendees into the world of liberal ideas, thus already signalling the main premise of the ELF HUB format. With keynote speeches delivered by Radosław Sikorski (a Polish politician and journalist, a Civic Platform MEP, former Marshal of the Sejm, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of National Defense), Balint Magyar (a former Hungarian Minister of Education, MP, and a long-time leader of the Hungarian Liberal Party), Frederic Martel (a French writer, journalist, he holds a PhD in Social Sciences), the liberal program of the forum was launched.

On the second day, three ELF HUB sessions took place (“50 Years after Stonewall, 30 Years after the Berlin Wall: LGBT+ Rights in Europe”; “Europe: A Community of Citizens”; “Value of

Information in European Politics. Is Disinformation a Real Threat?”). The said panel discussions observed insightful remarks and contributions from experts from Poland and abroad, which was also true for the third and last day of Freedom Games, which featured four sessions under the ELF HUB banner. One of the most spirited and heated debates accompanied the session titled “Saving Planet for Our Children. The Tasks for Europe”. With numerous questions from the audience, the environmental activists stressed the need for politicians to take action in preserving the natural ecosystems and fighting climate change without any excuses. Another significant debate was held in the “Women to Save Democracy. Can Women Be the Inspiration to Renew Europe?” session. The last panel discussion, “North/South: Two Visions of Europe? Where to Place CEE?” brought together experts from various parts of the EU to talk about the future of the Central and Eastern Europe as a region that has much to offer, and the existing perspectives on strengthening the European integration by remedying the existing perspectives. Finally, a keynote speech was delivered by Tom G. Palmer (Executive Vice-President for international programs at the Atlas Network), who spoke about the links between “Free Trade and Peace”.

All the planned outcomes were accomplished: target audiences have become more familiar with the liberal agenda within the five topical areas that constitute the focus of the ELF HUB series; the attention of Polish media has been drawn to vital liberal topics discussed from a European perspective and thus reinforcing European dialogue in Poland; prominent speakers and guests who willingly contributed to vital debates were gathered in Lodz. Moreover, communication with both the media and target audiences was successfully rendered and executed, presenting ELF HUB as an exclusive part of the program of Freedom Games.

Summarizing, by addressing a set of key issues vital for strengthening the liberal perspective in the European dialogue, the ELF HUB 2019 project utilized its potential to efficiently influence Polish citizens and international audience, including politicians, decision-makers, journalists, opinion-makers, NGO activists, experts, members of academia, students, and the youth, bringing about a real understanding of how to reinvent liberalism and promote pro-European values now in the foreseeable future.

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