

Martin Krajča, Czech Police Raid on the Poetrie Esoteric School / the Path of Guru Jára in 2010: Consequences and Reflections¹

In this article, I provide an insider's perspective, drawing from my involvement with the meditation and tantric practices of this spiritual lineage since 1998. This viewpoint is further informed by my background in psychology, sociology, and psychotherapy, as well as a decade of human rights advocacy in the field of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for new religious movements. My experience includes negotiating with government bodies, media, politicians, and human rights institutions in the Czech Republic, the Philippines, and across the OSCE region. Here, I aim to integrate both personal and professional perspectives.

To begin, it is important to present some key facts, as much of the information surrounding these events has been, and continues to be, distorted by the media for sensationalism or to serve the interests of parties such as the police or anti-cult advocates.

1 This contribution was the basis of the presentation at the CESNUR conference in Bordeaux, France, on June 12, 2024, in a session titled "Storming Zion" Revisited: Militarized Raids and the Resurgence of Brainwashing Theory—Emic and Etic Perspectives. The title references one of the key contributors to the session, Professor Susan Palmer, and her work on this subject (Stuart A. Wright and Susan J. Palmer, *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*, Illustrated edition (Oxford University Press, 2015).media, and the public may be aware of a few extraordinary government raids on religious communities, such as the U.S. federal raid on the Branch Davidians in 1993, very few people are aware of the scope of these raids or the frequency with which they occur. Inspired by the Texas State raid on the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints in 2008, authors Stuart A. Wright and Susan J. Palmer decided to collect data on all the raids of this kind that have taken place in Western-style democracies over the last six decades. They thus established the first archive of raided groups and then used it see if any patterns could be identified. Their findings were shocking; there were far more raids than expected, and the vast majority of them had occurred since 1990, reflecting a nearly exponential increase. What could account for this sudden and dramatic increase in state control of minority religions? In *Storming Zion*, Wright and Palmer argue that the increased use of these high-risk and extreme types of enforcement corresponds to expanded organization and initiatives by opponents of unconventional religions. Anti-cult organizations provide strategic "frames" that define potential conflicts or problems in a given community as inherently dangerous, and construct narratives that draw on stereotypes of child and sexual abuse, brainwashing, and even mass suicide. The targeted group is made to appear more dangerous than it is, resulting in an overreaction by authorities. Wright and Palmer explore the implications of heightened state repression and control of minority religions in an increasingly multicultural, globalized world. At a time of rapidly shifting demographics within Western societies this book cautions against state control of marginalized groups and offers insight into the reasons why the responses to these groups are often so reactionary." , "edition": "Illustrated edition", "event-place": "New York", "ISBN": "978-0-19-539890-8", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "304", "publisher": "Oxford University Press", "publisher-place": "New York", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities", "title-short": "Storming Zion", "author": [{" "family": "Wright", "given": "Stuart A." }, {" "family": "Palmer", "given": "Susan J." }], "issued": { "date-parts": [["2015", "12", "4"]] }, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json" }). The following presentation will be about one such police crackdown on a new religious group and its consequences over time.

Comprehensive, factual details regarding significant dates and events can be found in resources like the *World Religions and Spirituality Project* about the Path of Guru Jára² or on platforms such as Human Rights Without Frontiers³, magazine *Bitter Winter*⁴ or OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meetings database⁵. Below is a simplified summary that aligns with the main points of presentation.

The Path of Guru Jára (PGJ) is a new religious movement that originated in the Czech Republic in 1996 when Jaroslav Dobeš, later known as Guru Jára, began publicly teaching spirituality and mysticism both locally and abroad. As the movement approaches its 30-year anniversary, it's essential to note that its first half was marked by fluidity and rapid growth. In 2002, the Poetrie school was established to broaden the reach of Guru Jára's teachings, making them more accessible to a wider audience, while maintaining a core focus on spirituality and esoteric principles. The movement attracted a diverse range of people, from those interested in the healing aspects of yoga to those seeking deep meditation experiences and pilgrimages on sacred places, alongside individuals who viewed Guru Jára as their spiritual teacher from past lives.

From the beginning, tantric teachings played a significant role in the movement, particularly focusing on how to transform sexual energy into spiritual one⁶. Among these teachings were specific practices addressing the karmic and energetic impacts of previous sexual partners, which could be mitigated through faith and tantric healing. Some techniques were shared among women or between women and men. The more severe cases, such as individuals recovering from traumatic sexual experiences, were addressed by Guru Jára himself through a tantric ritual known as “unhooking.”⁷ This

- 2 Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára Path’, World Religions and Spirituality Project - WRSP, 2019 - <<https://wrlrels.org/2019/08/07/guru-jara-path/>> [accessed 21 September 2024]. All the links to which this study refers were accessible on September 21, 2024].
- 3 Willy Fautré, ‘CZECHIA: The Czech Judiciary Questioned by the European Commission (Part II) | Human Rights Without Frontiers’, 2021 <<https://hrwf.eu/czechia-philippines-the-czech-judiciary-questioned-by-the-european-commission-part-ii/>>; Willy Fautré, ‘Jaroslav Dobeš and Barbora Plaskova: Two Forgotten Czech Citizens in the Immigration Detention Center in the Philippines’ (HRWF and FOREF, 2016) <<https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=3570&file=EnglishTranslation>>.
- 4 Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára: The Czech Court Case’, 2021 <<https://bitterwinter.org/guru-jara-the-czech-court-case/>>; Massimo Introvigne, ‘“Guru”: An Anti-Cult TV Miniseries About the Guru Jára Case’, 2022 <<https://bitterwinter.org/guru-tv-miniseries-about-the-guru-jara-case/>>; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára: The End of a Legal Saga’, 2024 <<https://bitterwinter.org/guru-jara-the-end-of-a-legal-saga/>>.
- 5 Camelia Marin, ‘Soteria International Intervention’, in *Session 15: Fundamental Freedoms 2 - Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief* (presented at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 2015) <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/188691?download=true>>; Martin Krajča, ‘7 Years of Persecution and Hate Crimes on Czech Religious Minority the Path of Guru Jára’, in *Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II* (presented at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, PGJ, 2017) <<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/0/341996.pdf>>; Athanassios Pantazopoulos, ‘Recommendations to the Czech Republic Regarding the Violation of Fairtrial Proceedings in the Criminal Case of Jaroslav Dobeš (Aka Guru Jára) and Barbora Plaskova and Administrative Case Regarding Registration of the Religious Community Path of Guru Jára (PGJ).’, in *Working Session 13: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II*, 2019 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/8/432725_0.pdf>.
- 6 Pavel Hlavinka, ‘Tantric Traditions in the Spiritual Teaching of Guru Jára’, *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 3, Issue 6, 2019, pp. 59–87, doi:10.26338/tjoc.2019.3.6.5; Pavel Hlavinka, *Evangelium Guru Jary Podle Pavla: Svědectví o Duchovní Cestě Člověka k Pravdě a Poznan Boha Diky Setkání s Guru Járou*, Vydání první (Nirvana Tree z.s., 2020).
- 7 Guru Jára, *The path of a holy man | Guru Jara Samadhi*, 2018 <<https://www.guru-jara-samadhi.com/the-path-of->

ritual, which involved the practice of maithuna (tantric sexual union), was usually reserved for cases such as sexual abuse, a high number of sexual partners at a young age, or sexual misconduct in professional settings in mental hospital.

In 2007, a participant in one of these “unhooking” rituals reported feeling dissatisfied with the experience and went to the police afterwards. The police behave very professional, neutral and subsequently closed the case, as no Czech laws had been violated: no psychological or physical coercion was involved, and the participant ended the ritual of her own accord. This remains the *only personal legal complaint* related to Guru Jára’s tantric practices from 1996 to the present.

In 2009, several lecturers who had been denied financial scholarships for the following year launched an anonymous online campaign, spreading accusations against the Poetrie school. Claims such as “you will be exploited financially, mentally, and sexually” and “lecturers are pimps” circulated widely. Additionally, apostates shared these messages with the families of Poetrie students. Just before the police raid, these former lecturers joined forces with key figures in the Czech anti-cult movement and branded the Poetrie institute a dangerous sect. Consequently, the Poetrie esoteric school was effectively shut down. However, some lecturers remained committed to continuing Guru Jára’s teachings in the Czech Republic despite these challenges.

In October 2010, the Czech police conducted a raid led by an anti-mafia special unit (ÚOOZ in Czech), targeting active lecturers from Guru Jára’s spiritual movement. At the time, Guru Jára had been living outside the Czech Republic since 2007. The anti-mafia unit had been tracking still active members of the movement for a year and was aware of his location. The raid included public arrests, intimidation, and the confiscation of personal property, including spiritual objects and essential work tools. While some confiscated items were returned after several months, financial assets were not restored until nearly a decade later. During the raid, detainees were subjected to psychological pressure, attempts at “deprogramming,” mockery of their beliefs, and, in some cases, sexual harassment⁸.

The information to the public was that the police were investigating human trafficking. Over the course of several few years, this police unit contacted every available woman who had ever been through Poetrie, trying to map out who the retrospective classification of victims fit. After hundreds of interrogations, they handed 8 cases of former members to the court, which they suggest classified as rape.

a-holy-man/”; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Sex, Magic, and the Police: The Saga of Guru Jára’, *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 3, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 3–30, doi:10.26338/tjoc.2019.3.4.1.1. \u00u0216 {} Sex, Magic, and the Police: The Saga of Guru J \u00u0225 {} ra \u00u0217 {}, {\i {} The Journal of CESNUR}, Volume 3, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 3 \u00u0211 {} 30, doi:10.26338/tjoc.2019.3.4.1.”,plainCitation”:”Guru Jára, The path of a holy man | Guru Jara Samadhi, 2018 <https://www.guru-jara-samadhi.com/the-path-of-a-holy-man/> [accessed 21 September 2024]; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Sex, Magic, and the Police: The Saga of Guru Jára’, *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 3, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 3–30, doi:10.26338/tjoc.2019.3.4.1.”,noteIndex”:7,”citationItems”:[{“id”:941,”uris”:[“http://zotero.org/users/10136269/items/U6TA8T79”],”itemData”:{“id”:941,”type”:”interview”,”language”:”en-US”,”title”:”The path of a holy man | Guru Jara Samadhi”,”URL”:”https://www.guru-jara-samadhi.com/the-path-of-a-holy-man/”,”author”:[{“literal”:”Guru Jára”}],”accessed”:{“date-parts”:[["2024",9,21]]},”issued”:{“date-parts”:[["2018"]]}}, {“id”:959,”uris”:[“http://zotero.org/users/10136269/items/KLI3B77V”],”itemData”:{“id”:959,”type”:”article-journal”,”abstract”:”The Guru Jára Path is a Czech new religious movement, founded in 1995 by Jaroslav Jára

8 Willy Fautré, ‘CZECHIA’; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára’; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára Path’; Krajča.

In 2014, the same Czech anti-mafia special unit also conducted a raid on a mosque in Prague, ostensibly to prevent terrorist activities. This offers a point of comparison for analyzing the nature of police interventions and their reception in Czech society.

Similarities and differences of anti-mafia Police squad raids

	Heavy armed police unit	Disrespect against people and faith	Pretext for raid unfounded	Blaming the entire community	Media neutrality	Support of politicians	Support of human rights institutions
Poetrie / PGJ raid 2010	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Raid at mosque 2014	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓

When comparing both interventions, several similarities emerge: violations of human rights, property confiscation, and the severity of the police response. In both instances, the official justifications for the raids were not substantiated—a pattern that, according to Professor Susan Palmer, is common in police actions against so-called dangerous sects. However, a major difference lies in the media and public reaction. Despite the seriousness of the allegations against the Muslim community, the media largely remained neutral, and any guilt attributed to the community’s leaders was not extended to the group as a whole. This stands in stark contrast to the Poetrie institute and PGJ, where the entire movement and its members were criminalized in the eyes of the public.

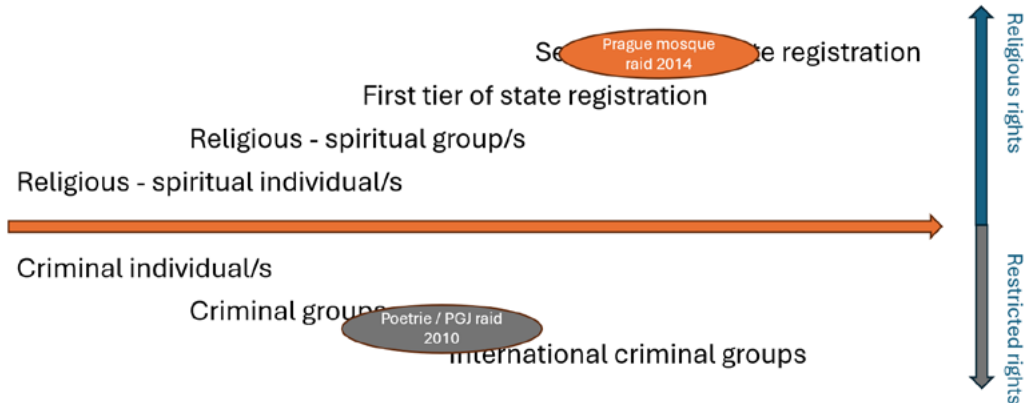
Even at the time of the mosque raid, the then-Minister of the Interior and other politicians spoke in conciliatory terms about the police’s actions, which prompted support from human rights organizations such as the Czech Helsinki Committee. This was not the case for Guru Jára and his followers. After several meetings, the director of the Czech Helsinki Committee, Lucie Rybová, suggested in her Letter of Support (2015) that the PGJ case involved religious discrimination and deserved proper investigation. Two years later she raised a similar initiative at the level of the human rights review of the Czech Republic UN UPR 2017⁹. She was the *only one* from the entire area of human rights field in the Czech Republic who showed any interest in the situation of the members of the movement. When this support turns out public, she faced internal pressure, which eventually led to the committee officially withdrawing organization support for PGJ.

This situation is better understood when considering the internal structure of the Czech Helsinki Committee, where the religious freedom section was led for decades by Ivan

⁹ Lucie Rybová, ‘Submission of the Czech Helsinki Committee for the Universal Periodic Review UN of the Czech Republic’, 2017, p. 5 <<https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=4510&file=EnglishTranslation>>.

O. Štampach, the head of the largest Czech anti-cult movement¹⁰. Zdeněk Vojtíšek, the spokesperson for the same anti-cult group, worked with apostates of the Poetrie institute in 2009, collaborated with the anti-mafia squad, prepared expert opinions for the court, and contributed to PGJ's unsuccessful attempt to gain official state registration in 2015.

Czech police raids of the same unit anti-mafia squad against different targets: police and media perception



Poetrie / PGJ group should have human rights as non-registered religious – spiritual group. However, anticult narrative labeled all members participating in spirituality connected with Guru Jara as victims or accomplices. Police used this narrative in their documents, for INTERPOL and for public to justifying their methods.

The police's decision to classify the entire organization surrounding Guru Jára as criminal aligned with the objectives of their department and enabled a severe intervention aimed at dismantling the group by any means necessary. In doing so, respect for human rights was disregarded, and the anti-cult narrative—simple and seemingly backed by scientific objectivity—became a convenient justification. This approach directly contradicts the fundamental rights of Czech citizens, including their right to freedom of religion and belief.

One clear example is the Czech state's attempt to pressure the Philippines into dismissing Guru Jára's asylum application as frivolous in 2015, and efforts to deport him forcibly during the ongoing asylum process¹¹. Or the lack of interest of the Czech state or Czech human rights organizations in the fate of Barbora Plášková's son, who was 10 months old at the time of her placement in detention in the Philippines and whom she raised as a single mother.

The tactic of criminalizing a particular group to strip them of their rights is an age-old and highly effective strategy, often employed by regimes with totalitarian tendencies, such

¹⁰ Martin Krajča, Edita Friedlová, and Filip Manek, 'Religious Persecution of Religious Minorities by Cooperation of State Bodies (Police, Court, Ministries) with the Anticult Movement in the Czech Republic', in *Side Event* (presented at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 2017), pp. 3–7 <<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/c/345726.pdf>>.

¹¹ Willy Fautré, 'Jaroslav Dobes and Barbora Plaskova: Two Forgotten Czech Citizens in the Immigration Detention Center in the Philippines'; Fautré, 'CZECHIA'.

as Russia or China, where the rule of law is more symbolic than practiced. However, even democratic societies occasionally adopt this approach due to its efficiency and simplicity for those in power (e.g., France, Japan, and the Czech Republic). This mechanism has been very well mapped by experts in the field of police raids on new religious movements and the essential role of the anti-cult narrative there¹².

The narrative of human trafficking and the alleged criminal activities involving the PGJ group, as emphasized by the Czech police in 2010, shaped the trajectory of subsequent media coverage (2011–2024) and influenced public perception and legal proceedings against the leaders of this new religious movement¹³. Lacking the knowledge and expertise to defend themselves in such a complex situation, none of the affected members of the Poetrie institute or PGJ filed lawsuits against the police for illegal procedures, intimidation, or sexual harassment (in contrast to the successful European Court of Human Rights complaint filed by the MISA movement against Romania). In hindsight, this was an unfortunate decision, as it allowed the state apparatus to “forget” the raid. Although I wasn’t directly targeted in the 2010 police intervention, which focused only on female lecturers, I have personally experienced significant discrimination at my university in 2011 after revealing my association with a spiritual movement. From that experience, I understand how difficult it is to defend oneself effectively during the initial shock. When a person is discriminated directly by the authority of the police, the impact on his or her psyche is of course even greater. The special anti-mafia police unit responsible for the raid was abolished („reorganized“) in 2016 due to their own accumulated scandals, but with zero liability for them. It took until 2021, after an extended and intense legal battle, for the financial assets confiscated in the 2010 raid to be returned.

Many key PGJ lecturers affected by the police intervention, investigation, and subsequent public campaign continue to suffer from serious psychological issues, including symptoms of clinical PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Some have even felt the need to emigrate. This hidden side of the story remains largely unexplored. The media mostly focused on the renegade and anonymously described unpleasant experiences of some women or generalize the testimony of those on whom the court ultimately relied.

While I do not deny that such negative psychological effects may have occurred to someone, who took part in the spiritual movement. The question remains as to their true cause. In what sequence and what made these feelings happen. My personal experience has shown how challenging it is to be an active member of a spiritual community and to navigate the conflict between one’s conscience and societal pressures. The anti-cult sentiment in Czech society has been equally damaging for both members and apostates of the movement in a bitter cocktail of shame, guilt and mockery. Active participants have been perceived either brainwashed or victims¹⁴.

For years following the raid, Czech state bodies responsible for human rights protection refused to acknowledge any violations of rights in this case. It took long-term

12 Regis Dericquebourg and others, *Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality: A Case Study: FECRIS*, ed. by Willy Fautré (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Wright and Palmer.2013

13 Athanassios Pantazopoulos; Krajča, Friedlová, and Manek; Krajča.

14 Massimo Introvigne, “Guru”.

efforts (2014–2024) at the international level, including engagement with the OSCE and the UN UPR, along with support from international organizations specializing in new religious movements, namely Soteria International¹⁵, HRWF, FOREF, CAP Liberté de Conscience and CESNUR — to gradually shift the perspective of Czech officials. While it may seem like a small improvement, when compared to the violent and illegal deportation attempt of Guru Jára from the Philippines in 2015, the Czech police’s handling of his transfer in 2023 was notably professional and neutral¹⁶. The involvement of more pro-democracy and pro-European parties in the relevant ministries by 2023 likely also played a role in this shift. However, in Czech media and society, the anti-cult narrative, initially promoted by the anti-mafia police unit, became the dominant explanation of Guru Jára deeds and remains highlighted to this day¹⁷.

The anti-cult trajectory set by the police raid also had a significant impact on the courts, although this is difficult to prove¹⁸. Judges, like anyone else, are influenced by societal moods. And the presumption of innocence was disregarded in Czech media long before the first court ruling was issued in 2014. Court proceedings were endless and only with great effort was it possible to halve the original 10.5 years punishment for Guru Jára and 10 years for Barbora Plášková¹⁹. It is difficult to explain why, even after Guru Jára and Barbora Plášková had already spent eight years in detention in the Philippines, i.e. 3 years more than the sentence that was finally confirmed by the court, the Czech public prosecutor continued to push for an additional five years of imprisonment. However, after nearly a year of uncertainty following the conditional release of Guru Jára and Barbora Plášková in October 2023, the legal case initiated by the anti-mafia police squad was finally closed, bringing an end to 15 years of proceedings²⁰.

While traveling on the TGV to Bordeaux to deliver my presentation, the final lyrics from Raphael’s *Sur la route*—”Sur tous les murs y aura écrit de la justice pas la vengeance” (“On all the walls, there will be written justice, not vengeance”)—deeply resonated with me. I believe this message should now prevail in Czech society as well: Justice has been officially served. Continued vendetta against a new religious group, fueled by anti-cult rhetoric, is no longer tolerable.

After 15 long years, we can draw some conclusions and offer recommendations for handling similar cases in the future, particularly in the Czech Republic.

The Czech state should actively promote diversity and religious tolerance, even

15 Camelia Marin and Mihali Flaviu, ‘Round Table Pre-Session on the Universal Periodic Review of the Czech Republic’, *Soteria International*, 2017 <<https://www.soteriainternational.org/round-table-pre-session-on-the-universal-periodic-review-of-the-czech-republic/>>; Camelia Marin and Mihali Flaviu, ‘Soteria International at the CESNUR 2019 International Conference, Turin 5-7 September’, *Soteria International*, 2019 <<https://www.soteriainternational.org/soteria-international-at-the-cesnur-2019-international-conference-turin-5-7-september/>>.

16 Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára and Plášková Deported to Czechia: Why They Should Be Released’, 2023 <<https://bitterwinter.org/guru-jara-and-plaskova-deported-to-czechia-why-they-should-be-released/>>.

17 Massimo Introvigne, “‘Guru’”; ‘Konec případu. Dovolání státní zástupkyně nepodá, guru Jára zůstane na svobodě’, dir. by Matěj Skalický and Kristýna Guryčová (Český Rozhlas, 2024) <https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/podcast-vinohradska-12-guru-jara_2409050600_mpa>.

18 Willy Fautré, ‘CZECHIA’; Pantazopoulos.

19 Athanassios Pantazopoulos; Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára’.

20 Massimo Introvigne, ‘Guru Jára’.

toward minority new religious movements, as these are hallmarks of an open and healthy democratic society. This contrasts with the more authoritarian approaches seen in some other states or the populist rhetoric employed by certain radical parties. For a truly democratic and welcoming society, someone—beyond just the new religious movements themselves—must advocate for this more inclusive approach. For inspiration, we can look to contemporary examples of FoRB practices that respect nontraditional religious groups in countries like Japan and France, where they also need support in this area.

A practical step forward would be to simplify the process for registering religious groups, especially in the predominantly atheistic environment of the Czech Republic. This could enhance societal perceptions and elevate both the dignity and legal standing of these groups. Because a common misconception in Czech society is that the right to religious freedom applies only to registered religious movements.

Although there is significant focus today on the rights of sexual minorities, racial issues, migrants, and longstanding support for women’s rights, matters of faith—particularly concerning new religious movements and sacred sexuality—remain susceptible to anti-cult rhetoric and perspectives that incite fear, social phobia, and hatred. This is not a standard that a modern democratic society should tolerate. For more on this topic, see *Freedom of Religion or Belief: Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality* ²¹.

Given the Czech Republic’s prevailing atheistic environment, which naturally fosters insensitivity to matters of faith, it would be wise to draw lessons from countries and organizations abroad that have been dealing successfully with the issue of religious freedom and the rights of new religious movements for many years.

I hope that everyone involved can take away valuable lessons from the past 15 years, leading to a deeper mutual understanding between members of new religious movements and Czech society, including representatives of the state, human rights organizations, and the media.

***Dr. Athanassios Pantazopoulos, Czech Republic:
Recommendations to the Czech Republic regarding the violation of fairtrial proceedings in the criminal case of Jaroslav Dobes (aka Guru Jara) and Barbora Plaskova and administrative case regarding registration of the religious community Path of Guru Jara (PGJ)*** ²².

I am a human rights and international law expert based in Prague. Since 2015, I am in cooperation with the Czech religious group Path of Guru Jara, especially in the issue of

²¹ Dericquebourg and others.

²² OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, September 2019 Working Session 13:

Tolerance and non-discrimination II (continued), including: Combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination; Combating anti-Semitism and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions (https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/8/432725_0.pdf).

their registration proceedings and disrespect of human rights in the criminal proceedings. So far I have prepared nine expert opinions on both proceedings, so I am familiar with the case. Czech Republic delegation is addressed annually on this religious group since OSCE HDIM 20151 .

My recommendations to the Czech Republic in the case of Jaroslav Dobes (aka Guru Jara), Barbora Plaskova and the religious society Path of Guru Jara (PGJ) are basically the same as last year for the reason, that these have been ignored so far, namely:

1. Take immediately effective measures for the fulfilment of fair trial guarantee such as the right to access the court, the case to be judged by an independent and impartial court, court hearing to be public, and with right to effective defense. This means also admission of evidence on the part of the defense.

2. The court should without delay decide about cancellation of the arrest warrant as its prolongation is against EU jurisprudence and is causing arbitrary detention of Jaroslav Dobes (aka Guru Jara), Barbora Plaskova for more than 4 and half years²³.

3. Accused persons and religious communities should not be subjected to judicial harassment by unwarranted legal and administrative proceedings, or any other form of misuse of administrative and judicial authority.

4. To adapt such registration system of religious community, which will be friendly, flexible, supporting religious diversity within the country and without the influence of members of the Czech anti-cult movement²⁴.

5. Protect religious community Path of Guru Jara against hate-speech, discrimination and hate-crimes in Czech society with available support from the Czech state – for instance as it has committed under the adapted UN UPR recommendations in 2017. So far, efforts of members of this minor religion to be noticed, invited for dialog and be protected have been ignored.

During the Implementation meeting last year I have addressed the delegate from the Czech Republic with the list of human rights violations and following question: *”Who in this case and how will guarantee the right of fair-trial and respect of the European and international commitments. I feel, that after several years of delay, came the time act to act swiftly“*.

The reaction of the Czech delegate was the following: *”In the Czech Republic the right of fair trial, freedom of religion and believe, tolerance and non-discrimination are safeguarded by the Constitution and by the law. They are fully in line with our international obligations“*.

For Guru Jara, Barbora Plaskova and their religious society PGJ, the guarantee of fair-trial and respect of freedom of religion and believe in every democratic society given by Czech Constitution and also important EU legislation, according to my opinion, is not met. What is the situation one year after regarding both proceedings:

23 By Soteria International in 2015 (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/188691>), by Human Rights Without Frontiers in 2016 (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/267236>) and 2017 (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/343316>). In 2018 by Dr. Pantazopoulos (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/393809>).

24 About history and impact of the Czech anti-cult movement in the Czech Republic PGJ presented a side-event at OSCE HDIM 2017 (Source: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/345726?download=true>).

I. Legal case of Guru Jara and Barbora Plaskova

First, I would like to raise attention to more than 5 years court case in the Czech Republic with 2 highest representatives of PGJ, where the crucial aspects of fair-trial are severely violated, with serious consequences for 2 accused persons, but also hundreds members of PGJ religious group.

Guru Jara acted as a successful spiritual teacher in the Czech Republic in 1996 – 2007. Between years 2010-2012, the Czech special police unit investigated members of religious community of Guru Jara in the country initially for alleged human trafficking of hundreds of woman. After years, this has been re-classified by police on sexual abuse of 8 woman. In 2014 started series of courts which led to contemporary result of *final verdict sexual abuse of one woman* supposedly committed by Guru Jara and Barbora Plaskova in 2006 *during a tantric ritual*. The appeal at the Czech Constitutional court was for Guru Jara recently denied, so this individual case may be addressed to the European Court of Human Rights. The rest 7 cases of allegedly abused woman (for the second time returned to better examination by higher court) were stopped by regional court at the end of 2018, without acquittal or further examination with chance on possible emerging punishment. However, Guru Jara's and Plaskova's lawyers this year re-opened this trial aimed to get the regional court to state their full innocence.

My colleague, Dr. Alessandro Amicarelli, solicitor of the Senior Courts of England and Wales, and a barrister of Italy, specializing in International and Human Rights Law and Immigration and Refugee Law, during a CESNUR conference two weeks ago in Turin²⁵ mentioned that *„the case of Guru Jara is very interesting from a legal point of view because this case perfectly fits what I personally call the trinity of cult creation. This trinity is made up of the following three elements:*

1. *Suspicion or Allegations / Accusations of mind manipulation and brainwashing;*
2. *Suspicion or Allegations / Accusations of Money Extortion and Fraud;*
3. *Suspicion or Allegations / Accusations of Sexual Abuse. That in many cases are totally unfounded and intentionally made up by anti-cult groups or former members of the specific organizations.*

Basically anti-cult groups working in collaboration with government bodies, mainly departments and ministries of the government, the police and with the actual support of the judiciary, in court cases, they manage to create cases which in many cases have no evidence and no proof whatsoever, just allegations and accusations only. Sadly this is very common to many philosophical, spiritual and religious groups. “

“I can give you some figures about the cases of fair trial violation in Czech Republic. As I said, Czech Republic is a member of the Council of Europe, and it is bound by the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950. Almost 80 % of cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights in respect to the Czech Republic result in judgments

²⁵ Cooperated on his paper with Willy FAUTRÉ, Human Rights Without Frontiers, Brussels, Belgium for CESNUR conference: Re-enchanted the world: Spiritualities and religions of the third millennium. Lecture presented in section 30: Sex, Magic and the Police: The Saga of Guru Jara. Source: <https://www.cesnur.org/2019/turinprogram.htm>.

confirming violation of Art. 6 ECHR. About 60 % of these judgments confirm fair trial violation. Over 60 % of them. Which means that it is quite common that in the Czech Republic a fair trial is not really the common thing. It is evident that there are several problems regarding the fair trial in the Czech Republic.”

The main court hearing in a criminal case of Jaroslav Dobeš and Barbora Plášková that took place 23.01.2018, was again held with *exclusion of general public* and it was pronounced that the trial against the accused would be held in the regime against the fugitive, although none of the legal conditions were met. Despite the fact that the court knew where both the accused occurred, it failed to summon them properly according to the international procedural service rules.

Repeatedly, the court does not want to have the defendants testified and uses as a pretext the proceedings against the refugees. When they ask for questioning by videoconferencing - which is possible under Czech law, the court does not allow it purposefully. This leads to the situation that *the facts of the case are not objectively determined*, ie. as the story happens from the perspective of the defendants.

At the re-opened case of 7 woman at the Regional Court, the trial has been going on for so long that there has been a change in the mandate of the public associates - the former mandate has expired. As a result, the entire procedure returns to the beginning as five years ago, to zero, so that new entrants can form their own opinion. Court must prove entirely again, all witnesses should be questioned again (so far even the few that really testified in court). The judge had known for a long time that the mandate of assignees were expiring, but she did not speed up in the trial. The delays in entire proceedings are striking.

The proceedings serves as a pretext for the Czech state to further demand the Philippines to extradite “escaped criminals”, which further extends arbitrary detention of Guru Jara and Barbora Plaskova, staying in immigration detention facility in Manila, Philippines over 4 years, where they asked for international protection because they felt persecuted by the Czech state. As stated repeatedly by Soteria International, the former hearings at the Regional Court in Brno, were not in compliance with the OSCE Reference Manual for Monitoring in the further mentioned fundamental principles:

- a) *Independence and impartiality of the court;*
- b) *Right to cross-examine witnesses;*
- c) *Right to unbiased and complex evaluation of evidence;*
- d) *Evidence exclusion and other coercion;*
- e) *Equality of arms;*
- f) *Right to adequate time for defense preparation.*

The above mentioned organization stated, that the criminal trial was not held in compliance with European Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter as: “Convention”), and it specifically points out the breach of Art. 6 of the Convention – the right to fair trial which sets the minimum standard of right of a person accused of a crime.

According to Article 6 of the EU Convention: Right to a fair trial the accused person has the right to a fair and public hearing that:

- is held within a *reasonable time*;

- is heard by an independent and impartial decision-maker • gives to the accused all the relevant information;
- is *open to the public*;
- is followed by a public decision.

The above clearly indicates that Czech Republic does NOT respect the EU legislation and International Conventions contrary to the statement of the Czech delegate last year.

There are serious doubts about fair-trial proceeding again leaders of this Czech religious minority since 2014.

II. Registration of the religious community PGJ and prosecution of GJ and other members

[On] 25. 7. 2015 an application was filed for registration of the religious community PGJ with the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. *More than 4 years this procedure is still pending at the City Court of Prague.* The application for registration has been rejected by the Ministry of Culture and a lawsuit has been filed to the City Court of Prague, which is still pending. This constitutes a violation of EU and International Treaties and Conventions, protecting the Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and the freedom to establish and maintain religious, charitable or humanitarian institutions. Furthermore, constitutes a violation of the fundamental principle that everyone shall enjoy the right to a fair, speedy, public trial.

PGJ's lawsuit against the Czech Ministry of the Culture contains several points, one of which is the negative role of assigned judicial expert in registering process of the group, who is also the main representative of the Czech anti-cult movement and who played also a very important role in emerging whole criminal case against two main PGJ representatives over 10 years ago.

According to the Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/40 (paragraphs 4 (c) and 4 (e)) and Human Rights Council resolution 6/37 (paragraphs 12 (e) and 12 (h)) Urges States, "To review, whenever relevant, existing registration practices in order to ensure the right of all persons to manifest their religion or belief, alone or in community with others and in public or in private;". Urges States, "To ensure that, in accordance with appropriate national legislation and in conformity with international human rights law, the freedom for all persons and members of groups to establish and maintain religious, charitable or humanitarian institutions is fully respected and protected."

Right to freedom of religion as a pillar of democratic society. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental right enshrined not only in the European Convention on Human Rights but also in many other national, international and European instruments. It is an essential right of considerable importance.

The above clearly again indicates that Czech Republic does NOT respect the EU legislation and International Conventions contrary to the statement of the Czech delegate last year. So, after a whole year, I ask the question again: "How can the Czech Republic in this specific case convincingly guarantee the implementation of European and International Treaties, which ensure the principle of fair trial and the rule of law?"

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Massimo Introvigne and Alessandro Amicarelli, Guru Jára: The Czech Court Case²⁶

In the first two articles of this series, we presented the history of the Guru Jára Path, its interaction with the Czech anti-cult movement, and its teachings on sacred sexuality that led to the criminal prosecution. As we mentioned in the second article, the police’s attention focused on the ritual of unhooking, where female devotees were “cleansed” of the negative psychic residues of their past sexual experiences through ritual intercourse with the guru.

The anti-cult movement had put the police on the track of the Guru Jára Path since the early 2000s, but the situation precipitated after Guru Jára and his main co-worker Barbora Plášková announced that they were leaving Europe definitively and move to Asia in 2007. A preliminary investigation of Jára had been started based on the complaint of a woman who had been unhooked but, rather than to the ritual, objected to Jára’s alleged misrepresentation of his own Tantric qualifications and initiations. Although before their departure Jára and Plášková had been interrogated, but no charges had been filed at the end of the preliminary investigation, the police placed both Jára in 2007 and Plášková in the 2009 in their wanted list since their whereabouts were unknown. Only later (2010) the police claimed Jára and Plášková had fled abroad to escape arrests. Jára and Plášková were investigated for possible financial fraud and human trafficking, but later these charges were dropped. Funds that had been confiscated were finally returned to the director of Poetrie, Lenka Cumplova, in 2021, after ten years of investigations had found no wrongdoings.

After hostile ex-members had supplied to the police a full list of the Path’s students, officers started identifying and interrogating all the women who had been unhooked, trying to find evidence of sexual abuse. More than half of the unhooked women were interviewed, some in person and some by phone only, by the police, which found eight cases of women claiming that the unhooking had been an unpleasant experience.

Prosecutors eventually regarded the case of L.N. as the more promising. She was the daughter of a senior police officer, told her story to the police, and successfully resisted further attempts by Jára’s and Plášková’s defense asking that she testifies in court, claiming post-traumatic stress and finally leaving the Czech Republic. Ultimately, the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno argued that her presence in the trial was not necessary, as her story can be reconstructed on the basis of the police records. Police documents argue that L.N., before participating in the ritual, had not understood what the unhooking was all

²⁶ Published in *Bitter Winter*, 08/04/2021.

about (although it was clearly described in the Path's publications and lectures), tried to stop the process, and was forced to conclude it by Jára and Plášková. The latter, she said, even kept molesting her after the ritual had concluded. Plášková's and Jára's attorneys objected, offering photographic evidence that, after the first unhooking, a smiling L.N. came back for a second session the next week, which would be strange if she had felt raped.

On October 19, 2010, the elite security force of the Czech Police (SROC), in cooperation with the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno, raided the premises of the movement and the homes of senior members in the Czech Republic. 13 female mentors were detained. Over 200,000 euros were confiscated. The involvement of the media and the fact that the raids were carried out in the early hours of the morning by elite police corps, as if they were dealing with terrorists, are similar to what happened in other "cult" cases.

On May 28, 2012, the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno issued an international arrest warrant against Jára and Plášková, for eight rapes allegedly committed between 2004 and 2006. On October 7, 2014, the same Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno sentenced Jára and Plášková, in absentia, to jail terms respectively of 10 and 9 and a half years. Consequently, under pressure from the Czech authorities, Plášková and Jára were arrested in the Philippines, respectively on April 14 and May 15, 2015. They applied for political asylum, claiming they were persecuted in the Czech Republic because of their religion. Their first requests were denied in 2015, based on negative information the Czech Embassy forwarded to the local Ministry of Justice, and, pending appeal, they remain detained to this day in the Immigration Detention Center of Bagong Diwa, near Manila, in circumstances international NGOs have described as unsanitary and dangerous, separated from children they both have in the Philippines.

On June 10, 2015, the Czech police even tried to forcibly deport Jára back to Prague from the Philippines, while his asylum case was pending. Paradoxically, the failed attempt, which had obviously been programmed before, occurred a few days after, on May 21, the High Court of Olomouc had cancelled the Zlín decision of 2014 and remanded the case to the Zlín branch court.

After a long delay, on January 26, 2018, the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno ruled on the case of eight women, and sentenced again both Jára and Plášková, to a slightly reduced jail penalty of seven and a half years.

On October 10, 2018, on appeal, the High Court of Olomouc divided the case into two separate branches. It ruled about the alleged rape of one woman, L.N., sentencing Jára and Plášková respectively to jail penalties of five and a half and five years. The case of the other seven women was sent back to the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno.

On March 27, 2019, the Czech Supreme Court confirmed the appeal verdict of Olomouc in the L.N. case and the jail penalties for the accused. Jára and Plášková filed a recourse with the Czech Constitutional Court, claiming that their right to defense had been violated, as they were not served with proper notices of the trials in the Philippines, and their lawyers were not able to interrogate L.N. and confront her with what they believed were her contradictions. The recourse was however rejected, as were (largely for formal reasons) those filed by Plášková and Jára with the European Court of Human Rights.

On March 31, 2020, the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno found Jára and Plášková guilty of rape or sexual abuse of another six women (the case of the seventh woman was dropped for lack of evidence), and the verdict was confirmed by the High Court of Olomouc on appeal on January 21, 2021. Procedural rules prevented the courts at this stage to impose further jail penalties on the two defendants. The decision is thus mostly symbolic, although it is dangerously colored by pseudo-scientific brainwashing theories, as it implies that even if the women consented to the unhooking they did so because they were psychologically manipulated by the defendants. The decision had been appealed by the defendants' lawyers to the Supreme Court.

Jára and Plášková are since 2015 in detention centers in the Philippines. Czech authorities continue to seek their extradition, and have indicated that if extradited they should purge in the Czech Republic their jail penalties of five and a half and five years respectively, despite the fact that their detention in the Philippines as illegal immigrants has already exceeded these terms.

The ball is now in the camp of the court in the Philippines that should decide about the asylum. Is this a simple case of foreigners sentenced for rape and sexual abuse, who try to escape justice in their home country? We believe our series of articles raises at least a doubt about it. Reconstructing Tantric sexual rituals as “rape” or “abuse” is simplistic. Unlike the Czech judges, we do not believe that the women who denounced Jára and Plášková visited the guru with the purpose of being unhooked without knowing what unhooking was all about. The process is clearly described in the Path's literature and, according to dozens of witnesses, explained in the Path's teachings delivered orally.

One may legitimately disagree with sexual rituals in general, but why they should be less tolerated in our societies than other forms of sexuality between consenting adults is unclear. It was clearly impossible for the defendants to get a fair trial in a climate poisoned by media accounts of the “cult of sex” and political attacks against the movement. The judges denied that the adults involved were really consenting, but that physical violence was involved appears very much doubtful within the context of a movement teaching sacred sexuality rituals. Stating that the women were manipulated into consenting is tantamount to argue that nobody would engage in sexual rituals or sex magic unless “brainwashed.” This is an aprioristic conclusion, and one that scholarly studies based on interviews with female (and male) devotees of esoteric groups practicing sex magic have consistently denied.

Massimo Introvigne, Guru Jára: The End of a Legal Saga²⁷

Numerous articles have been published in “Bitter Winter” and the scholarly “The Journal of CESNUR” about the Czech spiritual leader Jaroslav Dobeš, known to his followers as Guru Jára, stigmatized by Czech and international media as a “sex guru.”

²⁷ Published in *Bitter Winter*, 09/09/2024.

In fact, his teachings on the Tantric path encompass more than just erotic practices. Erotic topics are rarely the focus of his courses but are those who led to his legal prosecution. One particular practice he advocates, known as “unhooking,” is said to free female followers who seek it from the detrimental ties of previous sexual relationships. According to Jára, “unhooking” transforms the energetic consequences of their sexual history. Typically, their past sexual history is “deleted.” This is achieved through a ritual that involves intercourse (without ejaculation) with Jára.

Numerous articles we published detail the experiences of hundreds of women who underwent the “unhooking” process. Many of these women, some of whom I and other researchers personally interviewed, recounted the process as an empowering and freeing journey. However, a handful reported feeling mistreated, triggering a sequence of occurrences that we have meticulously chronicled in our earlier publications.

Condensing the narrative into a brief overview, we encounter two conflicting accounts. From the perspective of Guru Jára and his followers, the accusations are merely the resentments of a few former members, whose claims are contradicted by the positive testimonies of numerous adherents who share a vastly different experience with the group and its practices. On the opposing side, critics, journalists, creators of a slanderous television miniseries on the subject, the prosecuting attorney, and ultimately the Czech judiciary, have determined that, for some women, the rituals conducted by Jára constituted sexual abuse. Consequently, Jára and his principal associate, Barbora Plášková, received prison sentences of five and a half years and five years, respectively.

The topic of spiritual groups that advocate sacred eroticism is invariably sensitive. I will refrain from reiterating my and others’ skepticism regarding the Czech verdict’s impartiality here. Those who are curious about this matter are encouraged to consult our previously published studies for more information.

This article is about more recent and positive developments. When Jára and Barbora were sentenced, they were not present in the Czech Republic but were in the Philippines, imparting teachings to followers from different nations at their community’s ashram in Siargao. Following demands from Czech officials, their arrest came in 2015. They contended that the Czech ruling was influenced by political motives and thus sought asylum in the Philippines. While awaiting the asylum decision, they were confined in the Bagong Diwa Immigration Detention Center near Manila, a facility criticized by international NGOs for its unsanitary and perilous conditions. Plášková faced the hardship of being separated from her infant son, who was also in the Philippines; she was permitted only two visits with him throughout an eight-year detention period.

On December 15, 2015, the Philippine Department of Justice declined the asylum request of Dobeš and Plášková. Subsequent appeals to the Office of the President were also dismissed on August 1, 2017, and June 4, 2021, leading them to seek a review from the Supreme Court. By 2023, the situation at the Bagong Diwa facility had worsened due to the presence of violent Japanese offenders who intimidated other detainees and continued their criminal activities from within. The Filipino authorities, seeking to address the mounting media scrutiny, decided to repatriate the non-Japanese detainees. Consequently, Guru Jára was surrendered to Czech officials and extradited to Prague via

Taiwan. Barbora's arrival in Prague followed. The Czech police hailed this as a significant achievement, though it was a response to domestic issues within the Philippines.

Jára was incarcerated in Prague on August 9, 2023. Despite his five-and-a-half-year sentence in the Czech Republic, he had already endured more than eight years of detention in the Philippines under deplorable conditions, as documented by humanitarian groups. His attorneys claimed that this duration should be credited against his Czech sentence, warranting his release, a principle that should apply to Barbora as well but was opposed by the state prosecutor.

The matter came before the Regional Court of Brno, which ruled on October 5, 2023, in the case of Jára and on October 11, 2023, in the case of Barbora. The court decided that the time spent in detention in the Philippines should be counted against the Czech sentences, as their attorneys had requested, and set the defendants free.

On October 23, 2023, the state prosecutor appealed. On December 14, 2023, the Court of Appeals of Olomouc decided to annul both resolutions and sent the matter to the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno to be examined again. The Court of Appeals of Olomouc asked to clarify whether Jára and Barbora were detained in the Philippines simply for the violation of domestic Filipino immigration laws or because the local authorities had been informed of their criminal prosecution in the Czech Republic. Obviously, this required communication with the authorities in the Philippines.

On July 8, 2024, after six months of correspondence with Filipino authorities, the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno rendered its decision. It stated that according to the information received from the Philippines, the detention of Jára and Barbora "was not caused by domestic [Filipino] acts of violation of criminal or civil laws; it was based on the notification of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Manila that they were fugitives in their country of origin. Out of diplomatic courtesy [since there was no formal extradition treaty between the Philippines and the Czech Republic], the [Filipino] Immigration Office granted the request for cooperation, declared them undesirable, and proceeded to locate and imprison them."

It was thus clear that Jára and Barbora were detained in the Philippines not for the violation of Filipino immigration laws but because of the criminal prosecution in the Czech Republic and the actions of the Czech Embassy. The question raised by the Court of Appeal of Olomouc was thus answered, and the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno confirmed that the time spent in detention in the Philippines should be counted against the Czech sentence, with the consequence that Jára and Barbora should be set free.

On July 18, 2024, the state prosecutor appealed again to the Court of Appeals of Olomouc. There were no new facts in the prosecutor's appeal and the questions that needed clarification in the Philippines had been clarified. The prosecutors, however, as they did since the beginning of Jára's legal saga, were skillfully using the "court of public opinion," and several media continued to depict Jára and Barbora, as did the infamous TV series, as dangerous "cult leaders."

It is clear that some media, the anti-cultists, and the prosecutor were less interested in serving justice than in destroying the Guru Jára Path as a spiritual movement. As it happened with other groups teaching sacred eroticism, some perceived the combination

of eroticism and spirituality as intolerable. On the other hand, it is possible that the advent of a new and more liberal President in the Czech Republic in 2023 and the government's efforts to fully align the country with the democratic principles of the European Union opened the way to a fair solution of the case.

The fact that on August 28, the Olomouc judges, with a final verdict, put an end to the prosecutor's obnoxious legal obstinacy and confirmed the decision of the Zlín branch of the Regional Court of Brno is a step in the right direction. Hopefully, Guru Jára and Barbora Plášková will now be free to resume their activities as spiritual teachers.