

“Human Rights Between Idealism and Self-Destruction: Lessons from the European Court“

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The human rights system was born in the wake of the Holocaust as a last barrier against barbarism. Today, its expansion has gone far beyond what the drafters envisioned immediately after the concentration camps — striving to cover almost all aspects of everyday life. Does this mean we live in a human rights paradise? Quite the opposite. Drawing on my twelve years at the European Court of Human Rights, this presentation reflects on what I call "human rights inflation" — the process by which the prodigious expansion of rights may have weakened rather than strengthened their claims. The crucial question is where the thin line lies after which evolution turns into inflation. This matters profoundly today. While international institutions debated proportionality and cultural sensitivity, authoritarian regimes learned to speak the language of human rights, weaponizing it to justify aggression. When everything becomes a right, we risk destroying a concept through conceptual inflation, until the original meaning is totally lost — and even the most horrific crimes can be justified in the name of "rights." Between idealism and cynicism, we must find a path that preserves both the integrity of human rights law and the hope for a just future.