



ACCURACY in ACADEMIA

Deconstructing Liberty

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Those collegiates who keep telling pollsters that the Bill of Rights is less important to them than their comfort may want to see how comfortable they would be in a nation, or continent, where leaders felt the same way. Perhaps the next time they backpack through Europe, they should stick around awhile.

“Since 2008, European Union Law has required countries to criminalize hate speech,” Jacob Mchangama, head of Justitia, a Danish think tank, pointed out in a speech he gave at the Cato Institute in April. “And hate speech laws are vigorously enforced.”

“Of course, some who are targeted under these laws are bona fide Nazis, but hate speech and offense laws tend to undergo what I call ‘scope creep.’” Lest our own idealistic youth think that this keeps right wingers in their place, they should look at just how comprehensively the EU does enforce these rules.

“In the United Kingdom, an atheist was convicted for religious offense after leaving caricatures of the pope, Jesus, and Muhammad in a prayer room in an airport,” Mchangama notes. “And in France, a mayor was fined for advocating a boycott of Israel.”

Indeed, the freedoms some of us treasure here in the United States may be at risk but in much of the world, they are gone. “From 1980 to 2003, the number of countries with a free press grew from 51 to 78, according to Freedom House,” Mchangama observes. “And this growth went hand in hand with an unprecedented spread of democracy and human rights at the global level.”

“But 2004 marked the beginning of a constant decline. Since then, we’re down from 41 to 31 percent of the world’s countries with a free press. Only 13 percent of the world’s 7.4 billion people enjoy free speech, while 45 percent live in countries where censorship is the norm.” Do we really want to join this latter group?