*Dr. Vadim Atnash*

**Conference Review**

The one-day interdisciplinary conference hosted held on April 30, 2025, at the University of Exeter Law School brought together a diverse panel of scholars, activists, and practitioners to explore the global challenges facing religious minorities. Titled *"Limits of Restrictions: Religious Minorities in Europe and Asia,"* the event offered a compelling mix of case studies, theoretical reflections, and first-hand accounts. The conference moderated by Dr. Vadim Atnash (Exeter Law School) was opened by Prof. Catherine Dupret (Exeter Law School) and Mr. Ivan Arjona Pelado, the president of the MEJORA Foundation and co-organizer of the event. Mr. Arjona also gave a vivid presentation on how unfounded security concerns are used to justify religious segregation and suspicion labelling in Europe.

Session I provided a comprehensive overview of systemic issues affecting various communities, covering a wide range of topics. These included the Turkish migration to Europe (Prof. Mustafa Altunok), the discrimination faced by Muslim minorities in Vietnam and Cambodia (Dr. Vadim Atnash), the Sikh genocide in India (Mr. Jaspreet Singh), and the Russian persecution of religious groups in the occupied territories of Ukraine (Dr. Serhii Shumylo). Key highlights included Prof. Emma Loosley Leeming's analysis of foreign soft power through religious influence in Georgia, as well as Dr. Mustafa Baig's exploration of how Islamic jurisprudence allows Muslims to maintain their religious principles while coexisting with the legal framework of a non-Muslim country. Dr. Birgül Yılmaz presented on *'Language, Ethnicity, and Religion: The Case of Kurdish Alevis in the UK'*, shedding light on their exodus from Turkey and the linguistic challenges faced by different subgroups of Kurdish Alevis.

Session II shifted focus to the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (AROPL), a lesser-known new Shia-derivative movement facing significant repression. The panel presented a rich triangulation of perspectives: sociological (Prof. Massimo Introvigne), international advocacy-based (Rosita Šorytė), and internal/emic (Hadil El-Khouly). Particularly striking were the detailed accounts of persecution not only in Muslim-majority nations like Iran and Malaysia but also in democratic countries, raising concerns about the global limits of religious tolerance.

The final panel, *“Tantra-Based New Religious Movements”*, explored the controversial intersection of sacred eroticism, media narratives, and legal persecution. Speakers such as Camelia Marin and Rosita Šorytė highlighted the often-sensationalist portrayal of these groups in mainstream media and courts, urging attendees to reconsider where the line lies between genuine abuse and the policing of unconventional spiritual practices. The panel moderator, Ms. Naina Eira Gupta, made significant contributions to the discussion from the perspective of traditional Tantrism.

Throughout the day, the conference maintained a sharp critical lens, blending grassroots testimonies with academic rigor. It was evident that restrictions on religious freedom are not only about law and policy but also about cultural framing, media representation, and geopolitical interests.

In summary, it was a thought-provoking and multi-angled examination of the fraught terrain of religious freedom in the 21st century. The conference succeeded in fostering a nuanced conversation, breaking new ground particularly in its focus on minorities from world religions and under-researched groups.

The Conference concluded with several key outcomes and reflections:

It marked an important step toward fostering greater sensitivity to religious freedom among participants. Widely praised for bringing together leading thinkers from diverse fields – including religious studies and human rights activism – the conference offered nuanced insights into how religious freedom functions as a complex and often contested space between fundamental human rights and state legislation.

As a rare initiative of its kind by the SLSA members and MEJORA Foundation, the conference demonstrated the significant potential of a multidisciplinary and comparative approach. It provided valuable exposure to current challenges within the international human rights agenda and highlighted critical issues that can be further explored through such collaborative forums.