



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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Presentation to the Parliamentary Assembly

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The economic crisis, the failure of the European Union to coordinate its migration and refugee policy and the continued conflicts and tensions between some member states were major factors which influenced the overall human rights situation in Europe – and thereby also my work.

You have my annual report in writing. You see that our Office continues its efforts to develop a constructive **dialogue** with the member states. I made 17 visits to member states. During such visits we – we are a team - seek honest discussions with the governments. We see parliamentarians. We also see ombudsmen and other national structures for the protection of human rights and prevention of discrimination as well representatives from civil society. We visit various institutions where human rights might be particularly relevant – places of detention, collective homes for children, refugee camps, Roma settlements and shelters for violated women.

We report from such visits, sometimes in letters and sometimes in fully-fledged reports – this starts a dialogue. We also try to draw general conclusions and give advice which might also be of relevance and interest for other countries. These are published in Viewpoint articles, Issue papers and Opinions. Some of these are of course controversial – and that is as it must be. Truth telling is an integral part of honest human rights work.

A strong emphasis is put on **prevention**. We stress that governments should be systematic in efforts to put an end to the human rights violations. We have argued for **national plans** for the implementation of human rights. I am convinced that initiating such preventive reforms is the only way to reduce the number of applications to the Strasbourg Court.

I mentioned the **economic crisis**. The reckless behaviour of some forced governments to allocate budget resources to rescuing the banking system. This, and the consequences of growing unemployment, has created a budget crisis in many countries. We are facing a risk that essential social protection will suffer. We already see signs that the poor and disadvantaged will have to carry much of the burden. That inequalities will grow. The protection of **social rights** will now have to be a major priority.

The other threat is that this economic crisis will lead to **a social and thereby also a political crisis**. A situation of unemployment and uncertainty about the future is a breeding ground for extremism. I am deeply worried about the level of anti-Gypsism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism in some countries. Migrants suffer xenophobic discrimination and bad treatment – while governments introduce more and more restrictive rules. We have homophobia and transphobia. The rights of minorities, including national minorities, are violated in this climate.

This is a **real challenge** for the Council of Europe, in my opinion.

It is particularly important that we think about the **children** in these minority communities. When I have pleaded that rich European countries should not now deport Roma migrants to Kosovo I have been thinking about the children among them. I have met deported children in northern Mitrovica; I know what I am talking about.

I mentioned earlier the consequences of **conflicts and tension**. As you know I have tried to contribute to the protection of human rights after the disastrous war in Georgia one year and a half ago. More than one hundred detainees have been released and there has been some progress on the six humanitarian human rights principles we defined. But the tension is still there, the political issues unresolved. And ordinary people in the area continue to suffer from this.

It takes time to resolve such political issues. In the meanwhile the rights and safety of people must be protected. We have to make clear that **no political position or ambition should override basic human rights**.

Thank you.