

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ

4TH QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT 2019

1 October to 31 December

Presented to the Committee of Ministers
and the Parliamentary Assembly

This report contains a summary of the activities carried out by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, between 1 October and 31 December 2020.

1. Visits and Missions

Visit to Greece (Lesvos, Samos, Corinth and Athens)

The Commissioner carried out a visit to Greece (Lesvos, Samos, Corinth and Athens) from 26 to 31 October devoted to issues pertaining to the human rights of migrants, including asylum seekers, with a special focus on reception conditions.

During her visit, the Commissioner met with the Minister for Citizen Protection, Michalis Chrysochoidis and the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy, Giorgos Koumoutsakos, as well as the Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis. The Commissioner visited the Moria Reception and Identification Centre in Lesvos, the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre in Samos and a transit camp in Corinth. She also met with the Mayors of Athens, Lesvos and Samos and representatives of civil society and international organisations in Greece.

The Commissioner observed a dramatic worsening of the situation of migrants, including asylum seekers, in the Greek Aegean islands since her June 2018 visit to Greece. Appalled by the desperate conditions prevailing in the islands' camps, which have turned into a struggle for survival, she called on the Greek authorities to take urgent measures to meet the vital needs of all these people and safeguard their human rights.

The Commissioner praised the strength of the asylum seekers and the solidarity of humanitarian staff and local communities who are trying to bring some measure of dignity to the camps and welcomed the Greek government's decision to transfer 20,000 migrants from the islands to the mainland by the end of 2019. However, she stressed that without lifting the geographical restriction, this plan was unlikely to significantly reduce overcrowding on the islands.

Commenting on the law then discussed by Parliament which aimed to speed up asylum procedures and returns, the Commissioner underlined that this law and its implementation should not lead to more and longer detention and must ensure that all asylum seekers have their claims assessed in an individual way, with effective remedies available to challenge rejections.

The Commissioner commended the financial support provided by the European Union, but underscored that funds alone will not solve the problem. She urged the Greek authorities to overcome all the bureaucratic obstacles that are hindering the effective use of these funds and the other European countries to take more responsibility in providing ways for relocating people from Greece to other member states, starting with unaccompanied minors. Lastly, the Commissioner stressed that Greece and the EU should also promptly consider how services for local communities can be better supported.

Visit to Bulgaria

The Commissioner visited Bulgaria from 25 to 29 November. The visit focused on racism, discrimination and intolerance, certain aspects concerning domestic violence and violence against women, and media freedom.

During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Vice President of Bulgaria, Iliana Yotova; the Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, Tomislav Donchev; the Minister of Justice, Danail Kirilov; the Minister of Interior, Mladen Marinov; the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Petya Avramova; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and National Coordinator on combating antisemitism, Georg Georgiev; the Prosecutor General, Sotir Tsatsarov; and with members of the Council for Electronic Media. In addition, the Commissioner met with the Ombudsman; the Chairperson and members of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination; members of the Commission on Religion and Human Rights and of the Committee on Legal Affairs of the Parliament; and the Chairperson of the Bulgarian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. She also had exchanges with journalists, human rights defenders, and other representatives of civil society.

The Commissioner travelled to the Stolipinovo neighbourhood of Plovdiv, where she met with members of the Roma community. She also held discussions in Plovdiv with the Mayors of the Maritsa Municipality and of the village of Voyvodinovo, followed by a visit to the village. In Sofia, the Commissioner visited a crisis centre for women victims of domestic violence.

Following her visit, the Commissioner stressed that the government should increase its efforts to fight the hate speech prevailing in Bulgaria in particular against Roma, LGBTI people and other minority groups. Furthermore, she called on the authorities to urgently address the situation of Roma who had to leave their homes in 2019 following rallies targeting their communities in several localities. The Commissioner underlined the need for a political and cultural shift as regards the treatment and image of minority groups and urged the government to take steps to recognise racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance for all offences and to implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, including those on forced evictions and the registration of associations of persons identifying as belonging to a minority. She also expressed concern about the demonstrations organised by extremist groups in Bulgaria and called on the authorities to condemn such manifestations.

The Commissioner regretted that the public debates around the ratification of the Istanbul Convention have propagated disinformation and have reasserted stereotypes about gender roles. The withdrawal by the government of the Child Protection Strategy and the debates on the possible delay of the entry into force of the new Law on Social Services followed the same line, and hostility against women's and LGBTI rights activists were also on the rise. The Commissioner urged the government to confront these dangerous trends and raise public awareness about the need to improve the protection of victims of domestic violence and children. Moreover, she strongly urged the authorities to reopen the debate on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, adopt the Child Protection Strategy without further deferment and ensure the timely and effective implementation of the Law on Social Services (the law was due to come into force on 1 January 2020; however this date was postponed by six months). The Commissioner also stressed the urgent need to increase the number of shelters and other social services available to victims of domestic violence.

The Commissioner was alarmed by the continuous deterioration of media freedom in Bulgaria. She noted that non-transparent media ownership, threats and harassment of journalists and the use of defamation suits were chronic problems and that political influence over media outlets undermined the credibility of the press. Lastly, she accentuated the importance of a free, investigative and independent press and stressed that journalists should be free to play their crucial role without interference.

The Commissioner's report on her visit is forthcoming.

Visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Commissioner carried out a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2 to 5 December, focusing on the human rights of refugees and migrants, including asylum seekers. During her visit, the Commissioner met with the then Minister of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Mektić; the then Minister for Human Rights and Refugees, Semiha Borovac; the Minister for Labour, Social Policy, Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Sarajevo Canton, Malik Garibija; the Prime Minister of the Una-Sana Canton, Mustafa Ružnić, and the Mayor of Bihać, Šuhret Fazlić. She also met with the Head of the European Union Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Johann Sattler, as well as with representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, and from civil society.

The Commissioner visited the improvised migrant camp "Vučjak", the temporary reception centre "Bira" in Bihać, and the reception centre "Sedra" in Cazin in the Una-Sana Canton, as well as the reception centre "Ušivak" in the Sarajevo Canton. In view of the appalling living conditions in Vučjak, the Commissioner reiterated her call on the authorities to close the camp immediately. As for the reception centre "Bira", the very nature of the premises - a disused refrigerator factory - and the fact that they were used to accommodate some 1,800 people, meant that conditions were substandard, despite the best efforts of the IOM, which was running the centre. The Commissioner stressed the importance for the state to ensure that there are adequate reception capacities across the country. She also underlined the need for more humanitarian assistance and access to registration in the Una-Sana Canton, which had seen an increase in arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers. The Commissioner called on the authorities to adopt long-term measures in order to solve the structural shortcomings hampering migrants' access to the asylum procedure and protection. The Commissioner stressed that both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska should engage to help improve the situation and share more equally the responsibility for hosting migrants and asylum seekers. She expressed regret that Republika Srpska and several cantons in the Federation had refused thus far to take responsibility, and called on them to do their part too.

The Commissioner expressed grave concern about consistent reports, which she had received from a variety of interlocutors, of violent push-backs by Croatian law enforcement officials. She was particularly alarmed by stories of migrants being beaten and stripped of their belongings, including their shoes, and forced to walk back across rough terrain to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She stressed that push-backs constitute a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and prevent migrants from benefiting from other legal guarantees firmly established in international law, in particular the right to seek and enjoy asylum, the protection of life, and the prohibition of torture and collective expulsion.

A few days after the visit, the authorities relocated the migrants from Vučjak and closed the camp, which the Commissioner welcomed in a statement published on 11 December. The Commissioner will remain attentive to the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will follow up on the matter with the newly appointed Government.

2. Reports and continuous dialogue

Letter to the National Council of the Slovak Republic regarding a legislative proposal which would restrict access to safe and legal abortion care

On 26 November, the Commissioner published a letter to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, expressing concern at a legislative proposal which would restrict access to safe and legal abortion care. She noted that the proposal would introduce a number of requirements running counter to the principle of non-retrogression, including subjecting women seeking an abortion to mandatory ultrasounds and requiring them to view and receive images obtained through such an ultrasound. She noted that abortion counselling should never be mandatory, biased or directive. The Commissioner further stressed that a proposed prohibition on ‘advertising’ of abortion services could prevent health care professionals from providing necessary public information on safe abortion care, and impede women’s access to freely available, evidence-based and unbiased information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights. She noted that any regulation of access to sexual and reproductive health services must respect women’s human rights, including the rights to privacy, autonomy, personal integrity, and access to evidence-based and unbiased information, and that it should be guided by the principle of informed consent. On 5 December, the National Council of the Slovak Republic rejected the proposals to introduce new restrictions, a decision that the Commissioner has welcomed.

The letter is available on the Commissioner’s website.

Letter to the Prime Minister of Malta regarding the investigation into the murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia

On 29 November, the Commissioner published an exchange of letters with the Maltese government concerning the investigation into the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. In the letter to the Prime Minister sent on 26 November, the Commissioner expressed concern regarding alleged political interference in the investigation and called on the Maltese government to refrain from any action which would prevent the investigation from being or from being seen as fully independent. She recalled the Council of Europe standards regarding effective investigations and stressed the need to ensure the independence of the investigation in order to bring justice to the journalist’s family and to Maltese society as a whole.

The letter is available on the Commissioner’s website, along with the reply of the Maltese authorities.

Letter to the Chairman of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 29 November, the Commissioner published a letter she had addressed the previous day to the Chairman of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mirsad Zaimović, prompted by the revelation of cases of physical and psychological abuse of children with disabilities in the “Pazarić” institution for social care. In her letter, the Commissioner urged the Parliament to discuss concrete proposals for the deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities during a thematic debate on the situation in several institutions for social care, which was to take place on 4 December. Rather than renovating or extending existing public institutions, families of children with disabilities should be provided with the necessary services and support to ensure that they can be brought up in a family setting. The Commissioner also expressed concern about the hostility, including calls for criminal prosecution, targeting the member of Parliament who published the information and video material about the treatment of children in the “Pazarić” institution for social care and the whistle-blowers who provided those materials. Recalling the applicable international standards, the Commissioner encouraged the House of Representatives to send a strong message that retaliation or victimisation of whistle-blowers would not be tolerated.

The letter is available on the Commissioner’s website.

Letter to the Minister of Citizen Protection and the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy of Greece

On 3 December, the Commissioner published a letter she addressed to the Minister of Citizen Protection of Greece, Michalis Chrysochoidis, and the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy of Greece, Giorgos Koumoutsakos, concerning the Greek government’s plans to transfer migrants from the Aegean islands to the mainland and set up closed reception centres on those islands.

The Commissioner requested information about the deprivation of liberty regime that would be applicable to the new facilities, whether the government intended to move all the people who have not yet been transferred to the mainland at the time of their opening to the new closed centres, and if all new arrivals will be housed in these facilities. The Commissioner also asked for clarifications concerning the decision to opt for closed reception and identification centres, the safeguards that the Greek government intended to put in place in order to ensure that detention would be used as a measure of last resort and details about the government’s plans as regards alternatives to detention on the islands, notably for vulnerable people, including children. Lastly, pending the implementation of the announced measures, she requested information about any immediate measures to improve the living conditions of those who remain in and around the existing facilities on the Aegean islands.

The letter is available on the Commissioner’s website, along with the reply of the Minister of Citizen Protection.

Report on Azerbaijan

On 11 December, the Commissioner published a report following her visit to Azerbaijan from 8 to 12 July 2019, focusing on the right to freedom of expression, recent developments concerning the situation of lawyers and the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The Commissioner regretted that no progress had been made regarding the protection of freedom of expression. Journalists and social media activists who express dissent or criticism of the authorities are continuously deprived of their liberty on a variety of charges that defy credibility. She once again called on the authorities to release all those detained because of the views they expressed and to fully implement several judgments of the European Court of Human Rights relating to arbitrary restrictions of freedom of expression. In addition, the Commissioner expressed doubts as regards the lawfulness of the travel bans imposed on dozens of journalists, lawyers, political activists and human rights defenders, stressing that the authorities must refrain from imposing arbitrary or disproportionate travel bans and lift immediately those which are in contradiction with the right to leave the country. The Commissioner also recommended decriminalising defamation and bringing legislation and practice affecting Internet freedom in line with European standards.

With regard to the situation of lawyers, the Commissioner observed that there is an acute shortage of lawyers, in particular in the regions outside the capital, which prevents many people from having access to legal assistance and representation. Noting that several steps have been taken by the authorities and the Bar Association to increase the number of lawyers in the country, the Commissioner called on the government to step up its efforts in that direction. She also underlined that the qualification process for a lawyer's admission to the Bar must become fairer and more objective and the independence of the Bar Association, as well its role in the representation and defence of the interest of its members, must be strengthened.

The Commissioner called on the authorities to take immediate measures to ensure that the right of access to quality legal assistance is effectively guaranteed to all persons as from the very outset of their deprivation of liberty. She stressed that the authorities should adopt a law on legal aid in line with Council of Europe standards and ensure that all persons effectively enjoy the right to legal assistance. Considering the fact that most of the lawyers recently disbarred or who had their licenses suspended were working on cases considered as politically sensitive, the Commissioner remains seriously concerned by the use of disciplinary sanctions – like disbarment - on improper grounds and unclear criteria. She recommended that the Bar Association strengthen the procedural safeguards to ensure that proceedings against lawyers are transparent and fair and that lawyers' right to express their views on matters of public interest are upheld.

The Commissioner commended the steps taken by the authorities to help people displaced as a consequence of the unresolved conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. She reiterated the importance of overcoming the decades-long impasse and finding a peaceful solution to that conflict, so that the people who wish to return may do so on a voluntary basis, in safety and dignity.

Welcoming that many internally displaced people have been relocated to settlements built for them and benefit from housing free of charge, the Commissioner stressed however that many others live in dormitories and collective centres in dire or substandard conditions, others have no possibility to own the apartments in which they have been resettled and their needs are not always considered in the allocation of housing. Several obstacles also hamper income-generation and self-reliance opportunities for IDPs, especially for persons living in the rural regions and urban areas outside Baku. The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to further enhance IDPs' access to all economic and social rights, in particular the right to adequate housing and the right to employment, and to provide livelihood opportunities to ensure that IDPs achieve self-sufficiency and do not entirely depend on government assistance. Noting that a majority of internally displaced children study in schools which were built or intended just for IDPs and are thus being educated separately from the

rest of the population, the Commissioner recommended ensuring mixed schooling and mapping the specific needs of IDPs, in order to better respond to the various challenges they face. Lastly, the Commissioner recommended lifting the restrictions imposed on IDPs' right to vote in municipal elections in the constituencies where they reside and ensuring the full participation of IDPs in decision-making processes.

The report is available on the Commissioner's website together with the comments of the Azerbaijani authorities.

3. Themes

Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom

On 7 October, the Commissioner commemorated the 13th anniversary of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, the Russian investigative journalist renowned for her human rights work. Paying tribute to Ms Politkovskaya's courage and legacy, the Commissioner emphasised that the continuing lack of clarity as to who ordered her murder fuels further assaults on human rights and media freedom.

On 16 October, the Commissioner published a joint statement together with Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, urging the Government of *Malta* to ensure that investigations into the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia are conducted in a prompt, effective, independent and impartial manner. The statement underlined that two years have passed since the murder, but that no convictions, no trials of ringleaders and masterminds have taken place. On the contrary, posthumous libel suits continue to target the family of Daphne Caruana Galizia and makeshift memorials to her are frequently removed. This only adds to the sorrow and pain of her family and loved ones. To date, three men have been charged with the murder; after almost 20 months, they were finally ordered to stand trial. However, ending impunity requires holding accountable not only those who carried out the murder, but everyone complicit in it, including the masterminds behind it.

On 21 November, the Commissioner issued a statement concerning a draft law extending the definition and scope of a "foreign agent" to any person who disseminates information and materials in the *Russian Federation* and receives foreign funding. The Commissioner expressed concern that this law would render the existing legal framework even more restrictive; in addition, extending the concept of "foreign agent" in such a manner would deal a major blow to media freedom and people's ability to receive and impart information. She urged the Russian State Duma (the lower chamber of the parliament) to refrain from adopting that bill, which may be used to intimidate and silence journalists, human rights defenders and other individuals, and called on the relevant authorities to bring the applicable legislation in line with European human rights standards.

On 17 December, the Commissioner published a statement urging members of the Parliament of *Albania* to review two draft laws, known as the 'Anti-Defamation Package', and bring them in line with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and Council of Europe standards. She stressed that these laws were in need of urgent improvement, as several provisions were not compatible with international and European human rights standards which protect freedom of

expression and freedom of the media. The Commissioner was particularly concerned that discretionary powers given to regulatory bodies, the possibility to impose excessive fines and to block media websites without a court order, as well as the introduction of state regulation of online media, may deal a strong blow to freedom of expression and media freedom in the country. She recalled that it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum and that self-regulation by the media, including online media, prevails.

Freedom of assembly

On 21 October, the Commissioner published a statement on police violence against peaceful protestors during unsanctioned rallies that took place on 19 and 20 October in Baku (*Azerbaijan*). The Commissioner condemned the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officials and urged the authorities to ensure that effective investigations into allegations of ill treatment were carried out without delay. The authorities should also adopt effective measures to prevent excessive use of force against peaceful protestors by law enforcement officials and ensure that the right to freedom of assembly is fully respected. The Commissioner was also alarmed that Internet had reportedly been shut down at the venue of the rally on 19 October and that journalists covering the protests were injured. She called on the authorities to pay greater attention to the right to freedom of expression in this context.

In a statement issued on 21 October, the Commissioner expressed concern about reports of attacks against journalists covering the demonstrations that took place in Catalonia (*Spain*) between 14 and 18 October, perpetrated either by demonstrators or police officers. The Commissioner noted a context of growing insecurity for journalists reporting on the situation in Catalonia in recent months and called for adequate investigations into all reported cases of attacks. More generally, she condemned all manifestations of violence during the demonstrations and called on everyone to feel responsible and play their full role in de-escalating tensions, by rejecting violence and showing restraint. While recognising the difficult circumstances in which the police had to operate, she also stressed that it was imperative for them to strictly abide by the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force, in order to safeguard the rights of those who demonstrate peacefully and to defuse tensions. In particular, she urged the Spanish authorities to reconsider the use of weapons such as rubber and foam bullets in operations aimed at managing public demonstrations because of the clear danger they present for the safety of peaceful demonstrators.

On 9 December, ahead of International Human Rights Day, the Commissioner published a Human Rights Comments on the right to peaceful assembly. She noted that, faced with the multiplication of protests, the authorities in several countries had taken legal and other measures that tended to erode this right. She recalled that restrictions to this right cannot in principle be based on the substance of the message of the protests, citing as examples bans or obstacles to Pride marches and other demonstrations in favour of the rights of LGBTI persons in several countries. She also expressed concerns at the harsh criminal sanctions imposed on organisers and participants of demonstrations, which have a chilling effect on the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly. The misuse of the requirement to notify assemblies, which often leads to their banning or dispersion and the sanctioning of organisers and participants, was also of concern, as was the adoption in several countries of laws that could lead to disproportionate restrictions of this right. Lastly, while acknowledging that policing of assemblies was in many places increasingly challenging, she insisted on the need to apply human rights compliant approaches in this area, to carefully assess the use of certain less-lethal weapons, and to apply a policy of zero tolerance in cases of excessive use of force by police officers in this context.

Human rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers

Following her Recommendation ‘Lives saved. Rights protected. Bridging the protection gap for refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean’ in June, the Commissioner continued working on the migration situation in the Mediterranean. On 7 October, she made a statement in relation to the meeting of EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers. She welcomed the efforts made to enhance responsibility sharing among member states and to ensure the swift and safe disembarkation of persons rescued at sea. She noted that the success of a disembarkation and distribution mechanism would largely depend on the participation and support of as many countries as possible, and should pave the way for a long-term and more ambitious system easing pressure on certain member states, with full human rights safeguards. She also warned that solving the question of disembarkation should not come at the expense of human rights protection in other areas, most notably the risk of persons rescued at sea being returned to places where they face serious human rights violations. She renewed her call on member states to suspend any co-operation activities with the Libyan authorities that impact on returns to Libya, until clear guarantees of full human rights compliance are in place. She also called for enhancing transparency and accountability for the human rights impact of migration co-operation with third countries more generally, as well as taking other steps, previously set out in the Recommendation, to ensure the protection of refugees and migrants at sea.

On 17 October, the Commissioner published a statement concerning the deplorable situation in the improvised migrant camp “Vučjak” near Bihać (which she subsequently visited), urging the authorities of *Bosnia and Herzegovina* to relocate all the migrants from that camp and close it. She also urged the authorities to uphold their responsibilities to handle migration in a human rights compliant way and provide the necessary help to local authorities. She reiterated those messages during a telephone conversation on 8 November with the then Minister of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Mektić.

Human Rights of Stateless Persons

On 3 October, ahead of UNHCR’s High-Level Segment on Statelessness of 7 October, the Commissioner issued a statement urging all Council of Europe member states to accede without reservations to the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the 1997 European Convention on Nationality, and the 2006 Convention on the Avoidance of Statelessness in Relation to State Succession. Recalling that more than 600 000 persons in Europe still lack a nationality or identity documents making it possible for them to enjoy the benefits of a nationality, she called for a renewed commitment to the goal of the UNHCR #Ibelong campaign (ending statelessness worldwide by 2024) and for concrete measures to address existing situations of statelessness and prevent its perpetuation.

Children’s rights

On 3 October, the Commissioner publicly congratulated the Scottish Parliament for adopting a law to give children equal protection from assault. She emphasised that there was no place for violence in children’s lives and hailed the law as a good step towards the full realisation of children’s rights in Scotland (*United Kingdom*).

On 12 November, the Commissioner met with the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children, Maalla M'jid. They exchanged views on their respective activities, issues of particular concern and priorities for action regarding children's rights and agreed to strengthen co-operation and exchanges of information between their respective secretariats.

On 13 November, the Commissioner took part in the opening session of the international conference on children's rights "*Redefining power: Strengthening the rights of the child as the key to a future-proof Europe*", held in Strasbourg in the framework of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. In the session – a discussion moderated by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and involving, in addition to the Commissioner, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the President of the European Court of Human Rights – the Commissioner shared her views on several issues, including gaps in the protection provided to migrant and refugee children; the need to repatriate children born to foreign fighters stranded in the North of Syria; attempts to backtrack on children's rights; and opportunities and threats facing children in the digital world.

Marking World Children's Day on 20 November, the Commissioner welcomed in a statement the substantial progress achieved in protecting children's rights since the adoption, 30 years ago, of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, she also underlined that much progress was still needed, notably in areas such as combating violence against children, child poverty, school segregation, the protection of migrant and refugee children or child statelessness. She also highlighted the need for more effective remedies against violations of children's rights, for better taking account of children's own views, and for full incorporation of the convention into domestic legislations. She recalled that safeguarding children's rights was not an option, but a legal and moral obligation.

Women's rights and gender equality

On 22 October, the Commissioner publicly welcomed the decriminalisation of abortion and the introduction of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland (*United Kingdom*), calling it a momentous day for equality for women and LGBTI people.

On 29 and 30 October, a member of the Office attended the Beijing+25 Regional Review organised in Geneva by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. The conference, which gathered over 800 participants including representatives of states, international organisations and NGOs, provided a forum to review progress and identify challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995. The eight thematic panels focused on: key trends on gender equality in the ECE region; closing the gender gaps through effective economic and social policies; ending violence against women and girls; education for gender equality as a powerful tool for transformation; financing for gender equality; women's representation in policymaking and decision-making; empowering women to build climate resilience and global goals; and the Beijing commitments. The member of the Office also participated in the panel of a side-event on "*Generation Equality Forum: Towards a Global Pact for Gender Equality*", organised by France and UN Women, where the work and the main concerns of the Commissioner on women's rights and gender equality were presented, notably as regards the need to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, support women's rights defenders and stand up for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

On 22 November, ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Commissioner issued a statement entitled *“Speak up against sexist hate speech”*, urging states to tackle sexist hate speech in order to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women effectively. Sexist hate speech hampers the full realisation of women’s and girl’s lives in Europe, violating their rights and providing a breeding ground for further psychological, sexual, physical and even fatal violence against women. Member states should ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention, which mandates the prohibition of sexual harassment, a set of preventive measures in the education sector and ways to encourage private companies and the media to set self-regulatory standards in this field and requires that violent perpetrators be duly prosecuted and sanctioned, and that victims be efficiently protected and supported. It is also essential to condemn sexism more generally and carry out awareness-raising initiatives questioning gender stereotypes, with the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 (on preventing and combating sexism) providing detailed guidance in this respect in a number of fields including the public sector, media, the workplace, justice, education and the private sphere.

Human rights of LGBTI people

On 22-23 October, a representative of the Office of the Commissioner participated in the 23rd meeting of the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network round-table in Prague. The network is an informal gathering of representatives from 35 member states of the Council of Europe working on LGBTI issues, who meet twice a year with the support of the Council of Europe, to discuss current developments related to the human rights of LGBTI people. Civil society, as well as representatives of relevant intergovernmental organisations, attend as observers. Some of the themes discussed at the Prague round-table included strategic litigation, “conversion therapies”, the inclusion of sex characteristics in anti-discrimination legislation, and governance of the network; there was also a separate exchange between the representatives of the Focal Points from the Balkan region.

On 24-25 October, the Commissioner participated as keynote speaker in the annual conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)-Europe in Prague. The conference gathered over 600 LGBTI activists from around Europe. The Commissioner also had several meetings with representatives of regional organisations working with specific communities, as well as with activists from various countries, who expressed concerns about retrogression in LGBTI rights, growing hostility against LGBTI people in several countries, and the worrying role of some politicians and of the so-called “anti-gender” movement. LGBTI activists also alerted the Commissioner to difficulties they face as human rights defenders, including insufficient funding and harassment online. In her speech, the Commissioner committed to be outspoken about the consequences of the general backsliding of human rights in Europe for LGBTI people, and to continue advocating for equal rights for all.

Human rights of persons with disabilities

On 26 November, a member of the Office participated in a round table organised by the Secretariat of the Committee on Bioethics (DH-BIO) in Brussels. The aim of the meeting was to bring together various stakeholders with a view to refining the scope and methodology of a study on good practices in mental health care and how to promote voluntary measures. The round table brought together, among others, disability rights NGOs, representatives of associations of doctors, psychiatrists, nurses and service providers, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, and different Council of Europe bodies. The member of the Commissioner’s Office stressed the

Commissioner's support to this project and conveyed her hope that it will contribute to providing guidance to Council of Europe member states on how to transform their mental health systems in light of the principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular the principle of autonomy.

Social Rights

A member of the Commissioner's Office participated in the 4th meeting of the European Social Cohesion Platform and the connected workshop on family as a hub for social policies on 9-11 October in Rome. The workshop, organised jointly by the Italian Government and the Platform, focused on social policies promoting work-life balance, family support measures, services for children witnessing violence and the eradication of child poverty.

Human rights of national minorities

On 18 October, the Commissioner welcomed the adoption by the Parliament of *Latvia* of a law that will make Latvian citizenship automatic for children born to "non-citizens" after 1 January 2020, and who would otherwise not have a nationality (non-citizens, most of whom belong to the Russian-speaking community, are those residents of Latvia who did not acquire a citizenship after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, or who were subsequently born to non-citizens). The Commissioner recalled that access to citizenship is a fundamental human right which, in turn, confers certain formal legal rights such as the right to vote and the right to be elected. The Commissioner welcomed the new law as a significant step toward Latvia's implementation of its obligations under the Children's Rights Convention to ensure the right of each child to nationality at birth. She expressed regret, however, that the law will not apply to non-citizen children in Latvia who are currently less than 15 years old.

On 29 October, the Commissioner published a Human Rights Comment on language laws and policies, which stresses the need for these to be carefully balanced with a view to accommodating diversity, protecting minority rights and defusing tensions in society. Referring in particular to laws and policies aimed at strengthening the state or official language adopted in several member states, she highlighted that, while constituting legitimate objectives of state policy, they should not be pursued at the expense of the rights of speakers of other languages, especially those belonging to national minorities, nor should they exacerbate existing cleavages. She therefore called on member states to devise policies on languages based on inclusive and pragmatic approaches and effective interaction with civil society organisations. She also called for more action to combat discrimination based on ethnic or national origin and on language, and for using incentives rather than sanctions when implementing laws and policies aimed at strengthening the state language, stressing that there should be enough opportunities for learning the state or official language and, at the same time, solid guarantees for persons belonging to national minorities that they can effectively use their languages. Lastly, she urged states to promote plurilingual education as a tool to strengthen social cohesion and prevent future conflicts.

Artificial intelligence

On 15 October, the Commissioner delivered a speech at the Conference of Council of Europe Justice Ministers "Justice in Europe facing the challenges of digital technology". In her speech, the Commissioner underlined some of the human rights challenges posed by governments' use of digital technology, particularly as regards equality and respect for privacy. Recalling her Recommendation

on Artificial Intelligence, published last May, the Commissioner encouraged member states to take the following steps: carry out human rights impact assessments of Artificial Intelligence systems; establish public consultations; engage with the private sector; and ensure effective parliamentary, judicial and expert oversight of the use of technologies in the criminal justice system.

A representative of the Commissioner's Office participated in the seminar "Artificial Intelligence and Its Implications for the Criminal Justice System" organised by the Academy of European Law (ERA). The seminar, held in Rome from 24 to 25 October, addressed some of the major issues pertaining to artificial intelligence and the justice system, including as regards criminal liability and prediction of crimes.

Independence of the judiciary

On 28 November, the Commissioner published a statement calling on the Parliament of *Hungary* to modify Bill T/8016 which risked affecting the independence of the judiciary. She expressed concern that the Bill may have a negative effect on the internal independence of courts and judges and fair trial guarantees for individuals. The Commissioner urged the Hungarian Parliament to carefully scrutinise the precise impact of the Bill and to carry out meaningful consultations with judicial professionals, experts and civil society representatives in view of modifying the draft law. She also reiterated her earlier recommendations on the need to strengthen collective judicial self-governance in Hungary.

Counter-terrorism and Human Rights

On 7 and 15 November, a member of the Office presented the Commissioner's activities related to the protection of human rights in the context of the fight against terrorism, at two events: a debate held at the University of Grenoble with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, and a representative of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; and a conference organised by the University of Strasbourg on the role of monitoring bodies in France, Germany and the United Kingdom in the context of the fight against terrorism.

Conduct of law enforcement officials

On 17 and 18 October, a member of the Office attended the 5th seminar of the Independent Complaints Authorities' Network (IPCAN), hosted by the French *Défenseur des droits* in Paris. The conference, which gathered representatives of 22 independent police complaints authorities, law enforcement officials, academics, and representatives of NGOs and international organisations, focused on three themes: policing of demonstrations; relations between the police and the population; and relations with vulnerable groups. The ensuing discussions focused on a number of issues, including ethnic profiling, community policing and the use of artificial intelligence in policing (predictive justice).

Fight against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

On 4 November, the Commissioner delivered a speech in a ceremony marking the 30th anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the CPT). In her speech, the Commissioner highlighted the role of civil society – the

Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) – in engendering the idea that led to the establishment of the CPT, and of the many human rights defenders that have worked over the years to protect their fellow human beings from torture. She praised the CPT for setting the standard in fact-finding missions to places of deprivation of liberty, acknowledging the contributions of its members and Secretariat. Reflecting upon the often deplorable situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and mentioning specifically her visits to Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Commissioner emphasised the need to find a systemic solution at the European level in this regard. She further highlighted the key role of National Preventive Mechanisms and similar bodies in preventing torture and ill-treatment, as well as the imperative to combat impunity for ill-treatment by state actors. The Commissioner stressed that it is crucial not to squander the achievements to which the CPT contributed, and assured the Committee of her full support in the fight against torture.

Co-operation with National Human Rights Structures

A member of the Office attended a conference entitled “Measuring and Enhancing the Impact of National Preventive Mechanisms”, organised on 16 and 17 October in Tbilisi by the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the designation of that institution as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). Speakers at the conference – which also included representatives of NPMs from Armenia, Slovenia, Greece and the Czech Republic, as well as UN and CoE representatives – highlighted the crucial role of NPMs in preventing torture and ill-treatment in all places of deprivation of liberty. The results of independent research on the impact of the work of the Georgian NPM on torture prevention were presented at the conference.

On 14 November, representatives of the Office of the Commissioner participated in the annual conference of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) in Brussels. This year’s conference focused on economic and social rights. The conference stressed that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, and recalled the international and regional legal frameworks on economic and social rights. It explored several issues of importance in Europe, such as poverty, social protection floors, and homelessness. It showcased actions undertaken by NHRIs in this field, including processing individual complaints, conducting research, reviewing draft legislation, and carrying out strategic litigation in courts.

On 26 and 27 November, a member of the Commissioner’s Office attended a conference dedicated to the 15th Anniversary of the Office of the Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman) in Armenia. Speakers and participants at the event included the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan; the President of the National Assembly of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan; members of the National Assembly; the Director of OSCE/ODIHR; the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media; the President of the CPT; the First Vice President of the Venice Commission; Ombudspersons from several Council of Europe member states and beyond; and representatives of civil society and international organisations present in the country. Discussions focused inter alia on the role of National Human Rights Institutions and their current challenges, freedom of expression and prohibition of hate speech, prevention of ill-treatment, including in childcare and social care institutions, and women’s rights.

Business and Human Rights

A member of the Office took part in the 2019 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, held in Geneva on 25-27 November, where the latest developments in the field of business and human

rights taking place globally as well as in the Council of Europe area were discussed. These included the progressive adoption of national action plans (NAPs) and examples of binding legislation adopted by some states to regulate selected aspects of business conduct. Several sessions dealt with themes directly relevant to the Commissioner's mandate, including the business and human rights connection in the context of tackling environmental harms and climate change; the role of national human rights institutions in promoting ethical business conduct; and strategies to prevent attacks on human rights defenders active in the field of business and human rights. The member of the Office attended the discussions of a panel organised jointly by the Council of Europe and the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the role of regional organisations in strengthening regional "races to the top" on business and human rights.

4. Other meetings

Rights Communicators' Network

On 3 and 4 October a member of the Commissioner's Office participated in a workshop organised in Vienna by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights as part of their Rights Communicators' Network, together with several international organisations, NGOs, foundations and experts. The workshop was a useful way to enhance inter-institutional co-operation in the field of communications and help construct integrated human rights narratives to counter backlash.

Meeting with the Slovenian Minister of Justice

On 15 October, the Commissioner met with the Slovenian Minister of Justice, Andreja Katič. Some of the topics discussed in the course of the meeting included artificial intelligence and human rights, protecting the rule of law in Europe, execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and a recent decision by the Constitutional Court of Slovenia on the Aliens Act 2017. The Commissioner took note of a judgment by the Constitutional Court of Slovenia finding that some provisions of the revised Aliens Act 2017, which allowed for push-backs of migrants in a situation of emergency, were in violation of Slovenia's human rights obligations under the principle of *non-refoulement*. The Commissioner underscored that the *non-refoulement* principle must be respected in all circumstances and in practice.

Exchange with the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament

On 21 October, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament. The Commissioner made a statement covering two main issues: migration and media freedom. On migration, the Commissioner presented the key areas of action for protecting the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the Mediterranean, as identified in her Recommendation published in June. In this context, she discussed the enhancement of effective coordination of search and rescue operations, timely and safe disembarkation, co-operation with third countries, the provision of safe and legal routes, and constructive co-operation with NGOs. She furthermore discussed issues concerning reception conditions, integration and push-backs. On media freedom, the Commissioner discussed the safety of journalists, including killings of journalists and slow or inadequate investigations, threats to journalists and other harassment. She also called attention to the hostile climate created towards journalists, as well as the specific situation of female journalists who are increasingly subjected to

threats of sexual violence. Following her statement, the Commissioner answered questions from MEPs on a wide range of issues. A video recording of the exchange is available on the website of the European Parliament.

Workshop on Enhancing Co-operation between the United Nations and Regional Mechanisms for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

A member of the Office attended the Workshop on Enhancing Co-operation between the United Nations and Regional Mechanisms for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights which took place in Geneva from 21 to 22 October. Discussions during the workshop focused on different models, good practices and lessons learned with regard to co-operation between United Nations institutions, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and regional human rights mechanisms, most notably in the field of combating racism and xenophobia. The following institutions were represented at the workshop: ECOWAS Court of Justice, East African Court of Justice, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Caribbean Court of Justice, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the League of Arab States, the Arab Human Rights Committee, the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission established by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as EU FRA, OSCE ODIHR and HCNM, and the Council of Europe. Speakers at the workshop included members of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the UN Committee on Migrant Workers, experts from the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD), representatives of the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism and the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, National Human Rights Institutions and members of civil society. On the basis of the discussions and recommendations, a draft resolution on co-operation with regional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights will be prepared for consideration at the UN Human Rights Council meeting in spring 2020.

Meeting with the President of the Spanish parliament and Vice-President of the Spanish senate

On 23 October, the Commissioner met in Strasbourg with the President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, Batet Lamaña, and the First Vice-President of the Senate, Narbona Ruiz. The discussions focused on the situation in Catalonia, in particular the demonstrations of October 2019. The need to review the 2015 Law on citizens' safety, regarding which the Commissioner had addressed the Spanish parliament in 2018, was also discussed. The Commissioner welcomed this meeting as part of the ongoing constructive dialogue with the Spanish authorities.

OSCE Security Days

On 8 November the Commissioner participated in the event OSCE Security Days, delivering a speech in which she underscored that, in an era when humans and machines are living in an ever-closer relationship, ensuring that technological development works for and not against human rights, democracy and the rule of law is one of the biggest challenges that states must face. She specifically spotlighted artificial intelligence as one of the sectors that has expanded the most without due regard for human rights, and warned against the risks that such a development entails for individuals and society at large. Among her recommendations, she called on member states to reinforce their monitoring of human rights compliance by AI systems and act anytime there is an infringement of human rights, as well as to strengthen independent oversight and empowerment of national human rights structures to engage in this field.

Meeting with the Chairperson of the French High Council for Equality between Women and Men

On 14 November, the Commissioner met in Strasbourg with the Chairperson of the French High Council for Equality between Women and Men, Brigitte Grésy. The discussion focused on several topics of common interest, including violence against women, sexism, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The two officials expressed their willingness to pursue dialogue and co-operation on these issues.

5. Human Rights Defenders

The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states continued to raise concern.

On 9 October, the Commissioner expressed disappointment with court decisions in three separate cases concerning the criminal prosecution and harassment of human rights defenders and civil society activists in Turkey.

On 16 October, the Commissioner issued a statement concerning the liquidation proceedings against the All-Russia Movement for Human Rights, an umbrella organisation for dozens of human rights NGOs in Russia. While noting that an inspection by the Ministry of Justice had revealed irregularities in the organisation's reporting to the authorities, the Commissioner stressed that, under European human rights standards, the dissolution of an NGO can only be used as a last resort, confined to exceptional circumstances justified by serious misconduct. She further noted with concern that the Russian authorities had employed the Law on Foreign Agents against the All-Russia Movement for Human Rights and its leader Lev Ponomarev at least seven times since the start of 2019, imposing sanctions entailing a heavy financial burden for legitimate human rights activities. The Commissioner urged the Russian authorities to discontinue the liquidation proceedings against the group, and to ensure that NGOs are able to continue their work in a safe and enabling environment. On 31 October, a member of the Commissioner's Office attended the hearings of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in this case.

In her statement of 21 November, the Commissioner called on the Russian authorities to refrain from adopting the new bill on Foreign Agents, noting with concern that if adopted, the law would render the existing legal framework – which was already incompatible with European human rights standards - even more restrictive (*see also section Themes: Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom*).

As a part of the Commissioner's thematic activities in support of human rights defenders in Europe, a member of the Commissioner's office took part in the conference "Protecting Civic Space in the European Union" organised by the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe in Brussels from 10 to 11 October. The event was aimed at strengthening dialogue between EU decision-makers and civil society organisations, and covered topics such as harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders online, as well as challenges to civic space in the EU. The high-level stakeholders from the UN, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Finnish EU Presidency acknowledged their commitment to tackling those challenges and expressed their support to human rights defenders. The conference was also attended by representatives of social media companies, including Facebook and Twitter, who discussed the potential of social media to protect democracy, civic space and human rights defenders. The conference's participants from civil society drew up a

set of recommendations to international organisations, EU member states and other stakeholders to support civic space in Europe.

On 31 October, a member of the Commissioner's Office participated in the Legal Dialogue Symposium, organised in Berlin by the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, a network of 178 non-governmental organisations from Russia and 20 countries of the European Union. The event, which featured an opening speech by former Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg, included a panel on Council of Europe Institutions, Civil Society and Human Rights. In that panel, the Commissioner's representative presented the institution's activities with civil society, including consultations with human rights defenders, support for defenders at risk, third-party interventions, awareness-raising, and co-operation with other intergovernmental organisations and institutions.

6. European Court of Human Rights

Third-party intervention in S.S. and others v. Italy

On 22 November, the Commissioner published her written observations submitted to the European Court of Human Rights in the proceedings relating to *S.S. and others v. Italy*, concerning the alleged human rights violations of migrants intercepted and rescued in Mediterranean Sea, and consequently returned to Libya.

In her submission, the Commissioner recalled that the effective protection and promotion of the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, at sea and on land, requires the full implementation of member states' obligations under international maritime law, human rights law and refugee law, read consistently with each other. She also underscored that changes adopted in member states' migration practices in the Central Mediterranean, in particular certain types of assistance provided to the Libyan Coast Guard, have resulted in increased returns of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to Libya, despite the fact that member states knew, or should have known, about the risk of serious human rights violations they would face in the country.

Furthermore, the Commissioner highlighted that, at the receipt of distress calls originating from any search and rescue region, member states' relevant authorities should not transfer responsibility for rescue operations to other state authorities, when they know or should know that such action would expose people in distress at sea to serious violations of their human rights. Lastly, she stressed that instructions issued in the course of such operations must be human rights compliant and that they should neither obstruct safety at sea and effective rescue, nor lead to the disembarkation of persons rescued at sea in a place that is not safe.

Third Party Intervention before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Wikimedia Foundation, INC. v. Turkey

On 25 November, the Commissioner published her written observations submitted to the European Court of Human Rights concerning the case of *Wikimedia Foundation, INC. v. Turkey*, which relates to the blocking in Turkey of Wikipedia, a free, multi-lingual, collaborative online encyclopedia hosted by the applicant, a non-profit organisation. In her submission, the Commissioner placed the blocking of access to Wikipedia in the broader context characterised by a pattern of undue restrictions on the right to receive and impart information on the internet and, more generally, by

a disproportionately heavy-handed approach to any content or information the Turkish authorities consider offensive. The Commissioner concluded that the way Turkish administrative authorities and magistrates' courts routinely have recourse to internet blocking was unacceptable in a democratic society and not compatible with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. She stressed that the systemic nature of the problem required far-reaching measures, including the complete overhaul of the relevant Turkish legislation.

7. Communication and Information work

The main media coverage for the period under review concerned the Commissioner's work on the topics of migration, media freedom and women's rights. Almost 400 news items were published by national and international media outlets covering the Commissioner's work.

The extensive media coverage on the Commissioner's work on migration was mainly triggered by two of her country visits:

The visit to Greece generated coverage in *7 sur 7*, *ABC Nyheter*, *ADNKronos*, *AFP*, *ANSAMed*, *Athens News Agency*, *Athina 9.84 fm*, *Atlantico*, *BBC*, *Deutschland Today*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *DPA*, *DW*, *Ekirikas.com*, *EuObserver*, *EuroNews*, *France 24*, *Greek reporter*, *HINA*, *iEfimerida.gr*, *Index.hr*, *InfoMigrants*, *Jutarnji list*, *Kathimerini*, *KontraNews.gr*, *Le Monde*, *Le Soir*, *Le Télégramme*, *N1 Info*, *Naftemporiki.gr*, *NRK*, *Ouest-France*, *Protothema*, *RAI News*, *Real.gr*, *Reuters*, *RTBF*, *RTE*, *Sofokleousin.gr*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Ta Nea*, *The Associated Press*, *Bulletin quotidien*, *CNN*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Epohi.gr*, *Italia Oggi*, *L'Humanité*, and *Prensa Latina*.

As for the visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was covered by *444*, *24 Heures*, *AFP*, *Agência Lusa*, *Agenzia Nova*, *Al Jazeera*, *Al Jazeera Balkans*, *Al-Arab*, *ANSA*, *ANSAMed*, *Avaz*, *Avvenire*, *B92*, *Balkan Insight*, *BBC*, *BHRT*, *Bljesak info*, *Courrier des Balkans*, *Daily Sabah*, *Danas*, *Direktno*, *Dnevni avaz*, *Dnevnik.si*, *Dnevno*, *DW*, *EFE*, *El Diario*, *Euronews*, *Expreso*, *FENA*, *France 24*, *Glas Istre*, *Hina*, *Hirado.hu*, *Index.ba*, *InfoMigrants*, *Klix.ba*, *Krstarica*, *Kurir*, *La Tribune de Genève*, *La Vanguardia*, *Le Soir*, *L'Osservatorio Romano*, *Mandiner*, *Milliyet*, *Mondo*, *MTI*, *N1 info*, *Net.hr*, *Observador*, *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, *OTR-online*, *Politika*, *Primorske Novice*, *Radio Sarajevo*, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, *RFE/RL*, *Reuters*, *RFI*, *RTCG*, *RTL.hr*, *RTV Slovenia*, *RTV.rs*, *Sapo.pt*, *Sarajevo Times*, *SDA/ATS*, *SeeNews*, *Sobesednik*, *STA*, *SwissInfo*, *Tanjug*, *Taz*, *Telegraf*, *The Arab Weekly*, *The Associated Press*, *The Canadian Press*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Weather Channel*, *Tportal*, *TV Hayat*, *Večernji list*, *VoA*, *Yahoo News*, *Lëtzebuurger Journal*, *24 Chasa*, *24 Info*, *Agence Europe*, *ANT1*, *Avgi.gr*, *BiH Vijesti*, *Blic*, *CNN Greece*, *De Standaard*, *Dimokratiki.gr*, *Dnes.bg*, *Dnevnik.bg*, *DPA*, *Efsyn.gr*, *Ethnos.gr*, *IBNA*, *Jutarnji List*, *Kathimerini*, *Liberal.gr*, *Novi List*, *Open TV*, *Politis Online*, *Queer.de*, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, *Reporter.gr*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Standartnews.com*, *Telegram.hr*, *The Telegraph*, *Tportal.hr*, *Nova Makedonija*, and *Vijesti.ba*.

A large number of media outlets covered the Commissioner's statements and third party interventions on migration (*AFP*, *Panorama*, *Agence Europe*, *Agerpres*, *Al Jazeera Balkans*, *ANSA*, *Ansamed*, *Arab News*, *Athens News Agency*, *B92*, *BETA*, *Balkan Insight*, *Bursa.ro*, *Cyprus News Agency*, *DPA*, *EFE*, *Euractiv*, *Euronews*, *Europa Press*, *FENA*, *Giornale di Sicilia*, *Hina*, *Hirado.hu*, *Info Migrants*, *Krstarica*, *La Vanguardia*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, *Mandiner*, *MTI*, *N1 Info*, *NRK*, *ORF*, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, *Reuters*, *RFE/RL*, *Sarajevo Times*, *SigmaLive*, *SIR*, *STA*, *Tanjug*, *The Irish Times*, *Time.rs*, *Tpi.It*, *Vatican News*, *Vesti*; *Aftenposten*, *AGI*, *Aktuelno*, *Avisen.dk*, *BBC*, *BT*, *BTA*, *De*

standaard, Die Presse, DW, Famiglia Cristiana, Foreign Policy, France 24, Gazeta Wyborcza, Il Giornale, Il Manifesto, Interfax, La Repubblica, Politiken, Prensa Latina, Ritzau, Spiegel, SwissInfo, The Guardian, and The New Humanitarian).

Numerous articles also covered the Commissioner's work on media freedom (*AFP, AftenPosten, Agence Europe, ANSA, Aktif Haber, Basler Zeitung, Berner Zeitung, Bianet, Cyprus News Agency, CNN, Cyprus Times, CyprusNews, Der Bund, Der Landbote, DW, Eco.hu, Euractiv.fr, Europa Press, Global voices, Irish Independent, Kommersant, La Vanguardia, Lovin Malta, Malta Today, MedieMix.no, MTI, RAPSİ, Politikis.si, Siol.net, Sta, Sky TG24, StockWatch, Süddeutsche Zeitung, T24, Tages Anzeiger, The Associated Press, The Canadian Press, The Guardian, The Malta Independent, The European Sting, The Shift News, The Washington Post, Times of Malta, To Thema, US News, Večer, Voice of America, 123Nyheter, Világgazdaság, WSBT, Yahoo news, and Zürichsee-Zeitung).*

The Commissioner's statement urging the Parliament of Albania to review the bills on online media were covered by *A2, Agenzia Nova, Albanian Daily News, Balkan Insight, BBC, BIRN, BNE IntelliNews, Cyprus Mail, EFE, Euronews, Exit, Gazeta Liberale, Gazeta Mapo, JOQ Albania, Klan Kosova TV, Lajm Press, Lapsi, Mail Online, Ora News TV, Politiko, Report TV, Reuters, RFI, Shqiptarja, Sot News, Standard, Startnews, The Associated Press, The Irish Times, The Jerusalem Post, The Washington Post, Tirana Post, Tirana Times, Top Channel, and TV Klan.*

The Commissioner's statement on transitional justice issues in the Balkans was covered by *Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera Balkans, B92, Balkan Insight, Beta, FENA, Fonet, HINA, Insajder, N1 Info, Net.hr, Novi list, Politika, Radio Sarajevo, Radio Slobodna Evropa, RFE/RL, The Associated Press, The New York Times, Tportal, and Večer.*

The Commissioner's work on freedom of peaceful assembly was covered by *AFP, Azer-press, EFE, El País, Europa Press, La Vanguardia, NacióDigital, OC Media, ORF, The Shift News, Trend, Turan and El Nacional.*

The Commissioner's statement urging the Hungarian Parliament to modify a bill affecting the independence of the judiciary was covered by *444.hu, Index.hu, Agence Europe, ANSA, Brief.com, Cyprus News Agency, Democrita.hu, Infostart.hu, Mandiner, MTI, SDA/ATS, and SigmaLive.*

The Commissioner's work on women's rights and, in particular, her letter to the Slovak parliament in which she urged the rejection of retrogressive measures on access to safe and legal abortion care, were covered by *Agence Europe, Metro, 24 Chasa, Aktuality.sk, BTA, Buongiorno Slovacchia, GP24, Nový Čas, SME.sk, TASR, Tvnoviny.sk, Ženy v meste, Catholic Herald, DPA, El Confidencial, El País, Europa Press, La Vanguardia, and SDA/ATS.*

Azadliq, Baltic Daily, BBC, BNE IntelliNews, CNA, Reporter, Contact.az, Kavkazskiy Uzel, Reuters, RFE/RL, The New York Times, and Turan covered the report on Azerbaijan.

The Commissioner's statement on children with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was covered by *Al Jazeera, ANSA, BHRT, Radio Slobodna Evropa, Reuters, SDA/ATS FENA, N1 Info, Oslobodjenje, Radio Sarajevo, TASS, The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Washington Posti, Vijesti.ba, and SIR.*

Additional coverage concerned artificial intelligence (*APA, DPA, Der Standard, and Kronen Zeitung*), language issues in Latvia (*Leta, LSM, and TOL*), Freedom of expression (*ANSA, Euronews, SDA/ATS,*

ANSAMed, and SwissInfo), Statelessness (Deutschlandfunk, DPA and The Moscow Times) minority languages (Agence Belga, Le Vif, RIA Novosti, and TASS), hate speech (La Stampa), justice system (Foreign Policy), human rights defenders (ANSA, DW, EFE, EU Reporter, Kavkazskiy uzel, La Vanguardia, RIA Novosti, and News-24.fr), torture (DW) Visit to Bulgaria (BNR.bg, BTA, Clubz.bg, Liberal.gr, OneTV, Paraskhnio.gr, Proto Thema, and Sega), pressure on the judiciary in Poland (Gazeta Wyborcza, and TVN24), and hate speech (The Sofia Globe).

On 21 November, the Commissioner presented her work at a meeting that the Club de la Presse de Strasbourg organised for its members. The Commissioner explained her mandate and highlighted the work done since she took up office, focusing in particular on migration related issues.

As of 20 December, almost 78 000 unique visitors had consulted the Commissioner's website during the period under review, double the figure corresponding to the last quarter of the previous year. On Twitter, 54 tweets were published, earning a total number of 2.6 million impressions and an increase of 3860 followers. On Facebook, 34 posts reached 65350 people and garnered 444 new page likes.