

# COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

**1<sup>ST</sup> PERIODIC ACTIVITY REPORT 2025**

**1 January to 30 April**

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, Michael O’Flaherty, between 1 January and 30 April 2025.

## 1. Country focus

### *Visit and Memorandum on Georgia*

From 21 to 23 January the Commissioner carried out a [visit](#) to Georgia. The [memorandum](#) following the visit was published on 26 March. It outlines the Commissioner’s concerns and recommendations regarding the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, the protection of civil society, and the rights of LGBTI people. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lasha Darsalia; the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandre Darakhvelidze; the Deputy Ministers of Justice, Beka Dzamashvili and Niko Tatulashvili; the Head of the Special Investigation Service, Koka Katsitadze; the First Deputy Prosecutor General, Giorgi Badashvili; and the Public Defender of Georgia, Levan Ioseliani; as well as representatives of international organisations. The Commissioner also engaged extensively with civil society and visited a journalist in prison.

As regards freedom of assembly and expression, the Commissioner noted that, despite credible reports of ill-treatment of protesters and journalists, no law enforcement officers have been held accountable for these abuses, while in contrast, criminal prosecutions against some protesters have advanced. He highlighted the ongoing challenge of ensuring proper identification of masked police officers as an obstacle to accountability and recommended requiring all law enforcement personnel to wear distinguishable identification and taking further steps to ensure effective investigations into cases of ill-treatment of protesters, including by strengthening the independence and effectiveness of the Special Investigation Service.

The Commissioner expressed concern about recent amendments to laws regulating freedom of assembly, which impose undue restrictions on protesters, expand law enforcement powers, and introduce harsher penalties for protest-related administrative offences. He noted that many of the amendments are incompatible with the principles of lawfulness, necessity, and proportionality and recommended amending the laws to bring them in line with international human rights standards. He also expressed concern about reports of interference with the work of journalists and highlighted the case of Mzia Amaghlobeli, whom he visited in prison, as an illustration of the increasingly challenging environment for independent journalism.

Furthermore, the Commissioner raised concern over the shrinking space for civil society, including the inflammatory rhetoric against NGOs and human rights defenders and the lack of involvement of civil society organisations in decision-making processes. He set out a number of recommendations to create an enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders, including rescinding the law on transparency of foreign influence and ensuring that any legislation on associations is in strict compliance with Georgia’s obligations under international human rights law.

Lastly, the Commissioner expressed concern at the level of violence and discrimination faced by LGBTI people, urging the authorities to cease all stigmatisation of LGBTI people and to repeal the law on protection of family values and minors, which provides a legal footing for discrimination against LGBTI people.

The Memorandum is available on the Commissioner's website along with the comments of the Georgian authorities.

### ***Visit to Greece***

The Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to Greece from 3 to 7 February, which focused on the protection of human rights in the context of border control operations and on the human rights of Roma. The Commissioner acknowledged the challenges posed by arrivals of asylum-seeking and migrant people, in view of Greece's geographical location and the persistently insufficient levels of European solidarity. He met with survivors of the Pylos shipwreck of June 2023, in which an estimated 750 people died, with lawyers and NGOs supporting them, and with the Greek Ombudsman, who had completed the report on his inquiry into actions and omissions of members of the Greek Coast Guard during the handling of the incident. The Commissioner noted the important findings of the ombuds and encouraged the authorities to take resolute action to ensure appropriate criminal and disciplinary accountability.

The Commissioner's attention was also drawn to reports of continued summary returns at both land and sea borders. He urged Greece to adopt a zero-tolerance approach and hold those responsible accountable and highlighted the importance of independent human rights monitoring in the context of border control operations.

Noting the sharp increase in arrivals on Rhodes and Crete, as well as the overcrowding in several existing facilities on other islands, the Commissioner called for adequate reception facilities and for rapid transfers, especially of unaccompanied minors, from the islands to the mainland.

Regarding the human rights of Roma, the Commissioner paid particular attention to issues of adequate housing and of police violence. He welcomed the adoption of a comprehensive National Strategy and Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma, while noting the need to overcome hurdles to local implementation of the strategy and the need to strengthen the participation of Roma members of society in the design, implementation and monitoring of the relevant measures.

While visiting a settlement in Halandri, the Commissioner observed that, despite the efforts deployed by its inhabitants and the municipality, housing conditions remain very poor and the Roma communities living there face persistent discrimination in their daily lives.

Finally, the Commissioner recalled that it is essential for strong rule of law-based states that the role and work of civil society and media be valued and supported. He also observed that the prosecutorial services should ensure that effective investigations are carried out in compliance with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

During his visit to Greece, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Migration and Asylum, Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos; the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Christos Stylianides; the Minister of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs, Sofía Zaharáki; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandra Papadopoulou; the Greek delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; the General Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, Georgia Adeilini; the Greek Ombudsman, Andreas Pottakis; the National Commission for Human Rights; and the Deputy Mayor of Halandri, Kostas Efthimiou. He also met with representatives of UNHCR, the European Commission, and Frontex, as well as with experts, legal professionals, civil society organisations, and victims of human rights violations committed at the borders. The Commissioner also engaged with members of the Roma community of Halandri. He met online with the Minister of Citizen Protection, Michális Chryssohóidis on 10 February.

The Commissioner's memoranda on migration and border control and on the human rights of Roma in Greece have since been published.

### ***Mission to Belfast***

On 24 and 25 February, the Commissioner carried out a mission to Belfast, Northern Ireland, to deliver the Annual Human Rights Lecture organised by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, and have further meetings.

The Commissioner delivered a [lecture](#) titled 'Uphold the rule of law – resist the pushback', addressing the importance of the rule of law and human rights, and emphasising the danger of withdrawal from their central tenets. He highlighted the need for evidence-based efforts to save the rule of law and to challenge disinformation and myths. He also discussed engaging with key actors, such as NHRIs, equality bodies and ombudsman institutions, as well as civil society, which has a central role to play. As regards state actors, he set out the need to do a better job of honouring the indivisibility of human rights, including particular efforts as regards social rights. He also emphasised the importance of human rights scrutiny by parliaments, and action to secure the independence of courts. Finally, he called for a re-engagement of the political middle ground as champions of human rights.

Alongside the lecture, the Commissioner had meetings with civil society on the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, with the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Alyson Kilpatrick; the Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Executive Office, Paula Bradshaw MP; the Committee lead on the Northern Ireland Policing Board and member of the Performance Committee, Nuala McAllister MLA; and with the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, Naomi Long MLA.

### ***Memoranda on the human rights of Roma in Finland, Ireland and Slovak Republic***

On 25 February, the Commissioner released three Memoranda examining the human rights situation of Roma and Traveller communities in Finland, Ireland and Slovakia Republic. Each Memorandum presented country-specific findings and recommendations based on the Commissioner's visits to these countries in 2024, addressing pressing human rights concerns faced by the communities.

#### ***Memorandum on the human rights of Roma in Finland***

In his [Memorandum](#) on the human rights situation of Roma in Finland, containing the findings and recommendations from his country visit from 23 to 26 September 2024, the Commissioner noted Finland's efforts to promote the human rights of Roma, particularly through the third National Roma Policy, and the long-established National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs. He also welcomed a new Action Plan to combat racism and promote equality, which specifically includes Roma, and which was launched in the same month as his visit. However, concerns remain over persistent antigypsyism and experiences of discrimination in all areas of life, including employment and housing. Roma women and youth face intersectional discrimination, while Roma from other EU member states often experience further marginalisation. The Commissioner recommended stronger action, including securing adequate, long-term funding, tackling all forms of discrimination, amplifying Roma voices in policymaking, addressing the specific needs of women and youth, as well as those coming from other EU member states, and fostering a supportive environment for Roma civil society.

The Commissioner's Memorandum and the comments of the authorities of Finland are available on the Commissioner's website.

*Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland*

On 25 February, the Commissioner published his [Memorandum](#) on the human rights situation of Travellers and Roma in Ireland, containing the findings and recommendations from his country visit from 7 to 11 October 2024.

In the Memorandum, the Commissioner stressed that Ireland had developed ambitious strategies aimed at a more effective protection of the rights of Travellers and Roma. In particular, the Commissioner commended the extensive consultation process with representatives of these communities that informed the development of the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Despite these positive developments, progress on the ground remains thwarted by structural anti-Traveller racism and antigypsyism in Irish society, which permeates all aspects of life. Adverse effects include over-policing and the significant overrepresentation of Travellers in the criminal justice system, the lack of culturally appropriate accommodation and overall substandard housing conditions for the communities, significant inequalities experienced by Traveller and Roma children in schools from early years onwards, and poor health outcomes compared to the majority population. The Commissioner recommended stronger political commitment to overcome entrenched discrimination practices and ensuring sustainable funding for targeted peer-led initiatives, including in the area of mental health.

The Commissioner's Memorandum and the comments of the authorities of Ireland are available on the Commissioner's website.

*Memorandum on the human rights of Roma in the Slovak Republic*

On 25 February, the Commissioner published a [Memorandum](#) on the human rights of Roma in the Slovak Republic, based on his visit to the country from 8 to 12 July 2024.

In the Memorandum, the Commissioner recognises the commitment of the Slovak Republic to addressing the human rights situation of the Roma communities, in particular through the National Strategy of Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma by 2030, ensuing action plans and other measures. In particular, he commends the initiatives put in place to overcome barriers in access to healthcare for marginalised Roma communities. Yet, the memorandum sets out that more efforts are needed by all competent authorities, including at local level, to ensure the prompt and effective implementation of the 2030 Strategy in all priority areas. The Commissioner particularly calls for urgent measures to address the inadequate living conditions of marginalised Roma communities, to prevent further deterioration of their already critical human rights situation. These should be combined with integrated and long-term strategic plans, adapted to the local needs and supported by long-term commitment and funding. While the Commissioner welcomes initiatives empowering Roma to act as bridges between the communities and public health and other services, he calls for measures to address all forms of discrimination in access to healthcare for Roma, especially women and girls. A compensation mechanism for victims of forced sterilisation should be established without delay. The Commissioner makes further recommendations on guaranteeing access to inclusive and quality education for Roma children and ending their segregation, and on addressing antigypsyism and discrimination, especially in the area of policing.

The Commissioner's Memorandum and the comments of the authorities of the Slovak Republic are available on the Commissioner's website.

***Statement on the adoption of the law on the Special Registry and Transparency of the Work of Non-Profit Organisations in Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)***

On 28 February, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) following the adoption by the National Assembly of Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) of the law on the Special Registry and Transparency of the Work of Non-Profit Organisations (so-called “foreign agent” law). The Commissioner noted that the adoption of the law was another setback for freedom of association and freedom of expression in Republika Srpska, following the re-criminalisation of defamation in 2023. He urged the authorities to repeal the law as it appeared to lack appropriate procedural safeguards and failed to sufficiently meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality.

***Visit to Ukraine***

From 17 to 21 March, the Commissioner carried out a [visit](#) to Ukraine during which he focused principally on placing human rights at the heart of the discussions towards peace. He stressed the centrality of human rights in efforts toward peace and recovery following Russia’s full-scale invasion. Highlighting the immense suffering of civilians, he called for human rights to be the foundation for any peace talks and reconstruction. The Commissioner underscored the need for justice and accountability, expressing firm support for initiatives and mechanisms such as the Register of Damage for Ukraine or the establishment of a special tribunal to address the crime of aggression against Ukraine and a claims commission. He urged international cooperation, including strengthening Ukraine’s domestic legal capacity and supporting investigations ongoing at the International Criminal Court. The Commissioner also stressed the need to secure reparation for all victims of Russian aggression. Noting the negative impact of funding gaps caused by the recent US aid freeze on humanitarian and human rights projects in Ukraine, he reiterated his earlier [call](#) on European states to fill the gap. The Commissioner drew attention to the dire situation of prisoners of war, missing persons, and deported Ukrainian children, calling for their urgent return. He condemned the lack of access for human rights monitors to Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, stressing the importance of maintaining international attention and increased monitoring of the human rights situation of people living there. On the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs), he called for improved humanitarian support and safe conditions for voluntary return. He placed a special emphasis on the role of women in peace processes and the involvement of civil society and international organisations in shaping Ukraine’s future. Finally, the Commissioner emphasised that Russia’s aggression threatened not only Ukraine, but the shared values of Europe. He called for an alignment between Ukraine’s EU accession pathway and the peace process, affirming that any path to peace must be anchored in justice, dignity, and human rights.

During his visit, the Commissioner [met](#) with the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine - Minister of National Unity, Oleksiy Chernyshov; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mariana Betsa; the acting Prosecutor General, Oleksiy Khomenko; the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets; the Secretary of the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Brigadier General Dmytro Usov; the Presidential Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Military Personnel and their Families, Olha Kobylenska; and the Gender Advisor of Ukraine’s Armed Forces, Olena Hrihoriyeva. He also [met](#) with representatives of Ukraine’s civil society and international organisations. In Lviv, he [met](#) with the First Deputy Mayor of Lviv, Andriy Moskalenko, and spoke to representatives of the Lviv region IDP Council in a local centre for IDPs from Mariupol. In nearby Novyi Rozdil, he met with a group of internally displaced persons living in an IDP collective residence. The Commissioner laid flowers in commemoration of Ukrainian soldiers at Lviv’s Lychakiv Cemetery and in Kyiv, accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Health for European Integration, Maryna Slobodnichenko, he [visited](#) the Children’s Hospital ‘Okhmatdyt’ which was partly destroyed by a Russian missile strike in July 2024.

The Commissioner's memorandum following the visit to Ukraine has since been published.

***Letter to the Marshal of the Polish Senate on the draft law amending the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners***

On 11 March the Commissioner published a [letter](#) to the Marshal of the Polish Senate, Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska, asking the Senate to refrain from adopting the draft law amending the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners in Poland due to concerns as to its compatibility with human rights standards.

***Statement on the right to freedom of assembly and expression in Türkiye***

On 24 March, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) concerning reports about disproportionate use of force by the police and widespread restrictions of the right to receive and impart information in Türkiye during the protests following the arrest and detention of the Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu. Condemning police violence against peaceful protestors, and the detention over 1,100 protestors, the Commissioner called for the immediate release of those who were detained for the legitimate exercise of their human rights. He also called on the authorities to fulfil their obligation to ensure that journalists can report on public assemblies freely and safely.

***Letter to the Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary on pending constitutional and other amendments***

On 2 April, the Commissioner published his [letter](#) to László Kövér, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, regarding pending amendments that raised concerns about their compatibility with human rights standards. He warned that banning peaceful events that promote LGBTI equality, purportedly in the interest of protecting children's rights, violates the right to freedom of assembly. He also expressed concern regarding the introduction of police powers to use facial recognition technology to identify and arrest those attending prohibited assemblies. The Commissioner further expressed concern regarding proposed amendments that appeared to deny the reality of intersex people and the diversity of gender identity and asked Parliamentarians to refrain from adopting the amendments.

***Letter to the National Council of the Slovak Republic on a draft law on non-profit organisations***

On 9 April, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (Parliament), in which he asked parliamentarians to refrain from adopting a draft law on non-profit organisations or any amendments which are not fully in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. Following a letter about the draft law in [May 2024](#), the latest letter addressed additional concerns about proposals to amend it. These relate mainly to the foreseeability of the law and the necessity of restrictions in a democratic society, which are required by the Convention. The Commissioner noted that the adoption of a law that fails to meet human rights standards would add to the disconcerting pressure on civil society, which he already highlighted following his [visit in July 2024](#). In view of a backlash against the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights because of its engagement with the draft law, the Commissioner also encouraged parliamentarians to speak out in defence of the Centre's independence and to acknowledge the clear legitimacy of its engagement with this legislation.

***Visit to North Macedonia***

From 22 to 25 April, the Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to North Macedonia which focused on the human rights of Roma and on the interplay between a clean and healthy environment and human rights.



The Commissioner commended North Macedonia for its long-standing commitment to advancing Roma inclusion and equality. He was however informed about a lack of effective implementation of strategies and challenges regarding the coordination between national and local authorities and available resources. He called on the authorities to strengthen efforts to combat antigypsyism in society and to show no tolerance for violence and discrimination against Roma in the criminal justice system. He invited the authorities to continue their efforts to tackle *de facto* segregation of Roma children in schools and fully execute the judgment in the case *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia*. He also drew attention to the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on the human rights of the most marginalised, including Roma.

Concerning the environment and human rights, acknowledging that North Macedonia is a party to all major international instruments on the environment, the Commissioner stressed the need for more effective implementation of international commitments and domestic laws and better access to justice. He called on the authorities to adopt the long-awaited Law on Climate, ensuring that it takes into consideration the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Verein Klimaseniorinnen Schweiz v. Switzerland*.

During his visit to North Macedonia, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment and Physical Planning, Izet Medziti; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Timčo Mucunski; the Minister of Justice, Igor Filkov; the Minister of Education, Vesna Janevska; the Deputy Minister of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, Gjoko Velkovski, and the Director of the State Environment Inspectorate, Ivana Ginovska. The Commissioner also met with the Ombudsman of North Macedonia, Naser Ziberi, and members of the Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. He held discussions with representatives of the United Nations and of the EU delegation. He also met with civil society organisations and human rights defenders working on the issues covered during the visit. The Commissioner visited the municipality of Šuto Orizari in Skopje, where he met the mayor, Kurto Dudush and visited a settlement lacking infrastructure, before visiting a daycare centre for street children.

The Commissioner's memorandum on his visit to North Macedonia is forthcoming.

### ***Mission to Serbia***

From 25 to 27 April, the Commissioner carried out a mission to Serbia, focusing on the policing of demonstrations and on the working environment for civil society and human rights defenders.

In his [statement](#) published following the mission, the Commissioner stressed the need to ensure that the framework for democratic policing is maintained and warned against discourse that stigmatises demonstrators. He urged the authorities to effectively investigate all acts of violence committed during demonstrations and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Concerning the alleged use of a sonic weapon, which is illegal in Serbia, during the peaceful demonstration on 15 March, the Commissioner urged the authorities and the Ombudsman Institution to swiftly conclude the ongoing investigations, to identify the perpetrator of the incident and ensure accountability.

The Commissioner further expressed concern about the unfavourable working environment for NGOs and human rights defenders, which has been further negatively affected by the reported recent action by the authorities. This included the alleged use of spyware on human rights defenders and journalists, "foreign agent" type smear campaigns and the leaking of personal data in the media, including information from the files obtained during search operations by the police at several NGO premises in relation to



investigations into the use of USAID funds. He urged the authorities to refrain from such action and to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders and for civil society work.

The Commissioner encouraged the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection to fully implement their mandates in terms of protecting human rights and personal data at the national level.

During his mission, the Commissioner [met](#) with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Ivica Dačić; the Ombudsman, Zoran Pašalić; representatives of civil society, students and international actors including the Head of Delegation and Ambassador of the European Union to Serbia, Emanuele Giaufret and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Gina Romero.

### ***Statement on human rights defenders in Azerbaijan***

On 29 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) requesting that the Azerbaijani authorities promptly release Anar Mammadli and all other human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists imprisoned for their legitimate work or for expressing dissenting or critical opinions and to drop the criminal charges against them, as well as any related restrictions. The Commissioner further urged ensuring that all laws and practices in connection with the freedoms of association, assembly and expression and the situation of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists in the country comply with the relevant Council of Europe human rights standards.

## **2. Thematic focus**

Reflecting the priorities highlighted by the Commissioner on taking up his mandate, the following section contains a brief description of the main activities of the Commissioner organised by thematic areas.

### ***Impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights***

On 31 January, the Commissioner met with Ukrainian human rights activist and former prisoner of war, Maksym Butkevych, and a civilian released from Russian detention, Leniye Umerova, to listen to the testimonies of their harrowing experiences of illegal detention and ill-treatment in Russia. Following the meeting, the Commissioner [called](#) for further efforts to secure the unconditional release of all Ukrainians unlawfully detained in Russia.

On 27 February, the Commissioner delivered a [speech](#) at a conference entitled 'The Role of the Council of Europe in the Pursuit of Peace, Justice and Accountability in Ukraine', organised by the European Law Institute at Dublin City University in Dublin, Ireland. In his speech, the Commissioner emphasised the centrality of human rights in achieving a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Condemning the widespread human rights violations resulting from Russia's aggression, the Commissioner outlined a ten-point roadmap focusing, among other things, on the need for accountability, reparation, and addressing the human rights situation of missing people and displaced persons. He stressed the importance of inclusive peace processes with the active involvement of women and the participation of civil society. Highlighting the threat that Russia's aggression posed for the entire European human rights framework, the Commissioner underscored the role of the Council of Europe in upholding justice and human dignity.

On 11 March, the Commissioner published a [Shout Out](#) entitled ‘Human rights should be an integral part of any peace talks on Ukraine’. In the publication, the Commissioner outlined his ten-point roadmap for a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine, centred around issues such as accountability for the perpetrators; redress for victims; the situation of prisoners, children, missing persons, IDPs, refugees, and people living in Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories; Ukraine’s martial law, reconstruction and EU accession pathway; the role of women in peace processes; and the involvement of actors, including intergovernmental organisations.

During his visit to Ukraine from 17 to 21 March, the Commissioner [reiterated](#) the need to place human rights at the heart of the discussions towards peace (see *Country focus*).

On 13 April, the Commissioner [expressed](#) his dismay at the Russian missile strike on the Ukrainian city of Sumy. Noting that the attack took place during religious celebrations, he deplored the loss of human life, expressed his solidarity with Ukraine, and called for those responsible to be held to account.

On 23 April, the Commissioner [condemned](#) a Russian drone strike on a bus which killed and injured civilians in the Ukrainian city of Marhanets. He called for holding the perpetrators accountable and providing redress to the victims.

On 24 April, the Commissioner condemned a wave of deadly Russian missile and drone attacks which targeted Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities on the previous night. He [stressed](#) the urgent need to help Ukraine protect the human rights of its people and to ensure that no human rights violations resulting from Russian aggression go unpunished.

### ***Human rights of Roma and Travellers***

The Commissioner’s work in this area includes dedicated country visits to Greece and North Macedonia and the publication of three Memoranda following his visits to the Slovak Republic, Finland and Ireland (see *Country focus*).

In addition, on 30 January, the Commissioner addressed a [video message](#) to the ‘National Forum on the Implementation of the Roma Strategy. Valuing Diversity’, organised by the NGO Voice of Romni, in Kyiv. Noting the challenges Roma face across Europe, he stressed the importance of standing up for the human rights of Roma by working together in combating antigypsyism, celebrating Roma culture and empowering Roma women to be leaders of change.

From 3 to 4 April, the Commissioner [travelled](#) to Heidelberg, Germany, where he met with Romani Rose, Chair of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma. Visiting the Permanent Exhibition on the Sinti and Roma Holocaust, the Commissioner underscored their essential work and leadership in ensuring the past is never forgotten.

On 8 April, the Commissioner [exchanged views](#) with Roma and Traveller youth and participated in the flower casting ceremony to mark International Roma Day organised by the Council of Europe. The Commissioner [acclaimed](#) the activism and leadership of Roma and Traveller youth and women, noting that they are driving change within and for the communities. He highlighted the richness and diversity of the communities’ cultural identities and language and emphasised the importance of promoting awareness of Roma history, including the Holocaust. The Commissioner also acknowledged the human rights violations and exclusion faced by Roma and Travellers across Europe and called for unified efforts towards a better future.

On 24 April, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concern about the plight of Roma who were left homeless after the demolition of their homes in Zaharna Fabrika, Sofia, Bulgaria, and urged the central and local authorities to act to prevent further deterioration of their critical human rights situation.

### ***Human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants***

During the reporting period, activities in relation to the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants included the Commissioner's visit to Greece (see *County focus*), his participation in the hearing of the Grand Chamber in cases against Poland, Latvia and Lithuania concerning alleged summary returns (see *System of the European Convention on Human Rights*), and a letter from the Commissioner to the Marshal of the Senate of Poland concerning legal changes enabling the suspension of the receipt of asylum applications (see *Country focus*).

Additionally, the Commissioner delivered a [video address](#) at the Parliamentary Conference 'Envisioning effective public policy to prevent and address cases of missing migrants', organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which took place on 23 and 24 April. He encouraged member states to invest in resources to identify those who have died in or on route to Europe, as well as in tracing missing migrants. He also called for the establishment of focal points in each member state, and for preventive action through enhanced search and rescue and the provision of safe and legal routes.

### ***Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human rights***

On 30 January, the Commissioner delivered a [speech](#) at the Embassy of Ireland in Paris on human rights oversight of artificial intelligence. He reiterated that human rights must remain central in addressing challenges posed by artificial intelligence and underlined the importance of making use of the current momentum for regulation to advance human rights in AI in Europe and beyond.

### ***Environment and human rights***

On 29 January, the Commissioner met online with several environmental legal experts and litigators. The expert discussion revolved around various human rights aspects of environmental and climate litigation and the growing recognition of the right to a healthy environment.

### ***Social rights***

On 10 April, the Commissioner met with Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context. Discussions focused among other things on discrimination against Roma and Travellers in Europe.

### ***Freedom of assembly***

The Commissioner continued to engage on issues related to freedom of assembly across member states. This included raising concerns about restrictive amendments to Hungary's assembly law, calling the President to veto them; publishing a Memorandum following his visit to Georgia addressing limitations on peaceful protest; issuing a public statement on worrying developments in Türkiye; and conducting a mission to Serbia focused in part on challenges to the right to assembly (see *Country focus*).

### ***Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists***

On 9 January, the Commissioner, following the measures for adjustments to the fact-checking policy that were taken by META and previously by X, [urged](#) states to redouble their efforts and demonstrate leadership in enforcing the relevant legal standards to ensure that internet intermediaries mitigate the risks of disinformation and unchecked speech. While recalling the main principles to combat disinformation such as legality, necessity and proportionality but also transparency and accountability, the Commissioner stressed that state actors, platforms and civil society should work together to uphold human rights and democratic principles while striking a balance between upholding freedom of expression and preventing disinformation.

On 3 March, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with [partners of the Safety of Journalists Platform](#) who presented him the findings of their [Europe Press Freedom Report](#). The exchange mainly concentrated on tackling current challenges such as combating dis/misinformation; SLAPPs; new ways of restricting freedom of expression including by using spyware technology; threats against journalist; impunity; and erosion of support for public media broadcasting. The Commissioner referred to his work on freedom of expression since the beginning of his mandate while stressing the importance of cooperating with partners to overcome the challenges.

On 28 March the Commissioner sent a [video message](#) for the Council of Europe European Year of Digital Citizenship Education in which he stressed the importance of embedding human rights in education, including in the digital space.

On 30 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) ahead of World Press Freedom Day stressing that protecting press freedom is not an option, but a legal obligation, and reaffirming his commitment to continuing to monitor press freedom in member states and to collaborate with the relevant actors to ensure the application of international standards.

### ***Combating racism and intolerance***

Marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January, the Commissioner stressed the imperative of keeping the truth alive and [called](#) for joined efforts to fulfil the right of all to live in dignity and peace. On 29 January, he attended the ceremony, including laying of wreaths in tribute to the victims of the Holocaust, organised at Council of Europe premises to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

The Commissioner continued to devote attention to issues concerning interreligious dialogue and the protection of faith communities and of their members.

On 28 January, the Commissioner delivered a [speech](#) at the PACE side event “For a Permanent Platform of Interreligious and Inter-convictional Dialogue at the Council of Europe”, co-organised by the Committee for Interreligious and Inter-convictional Dialogue of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). Noting growing patterns of hatred, the Commissioner [stressed](#) the importance of engaging with faith and non-faith actors on all issues of society and of addressing challenges by harnessing shared values of dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity and justice. He identified migration, combating poverty, the climate crisis, and artificial intelligence as major areas of cooperation in this regard.

The Commissioner [met](#), on 29 January, with representatives of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. The discussions focused on the importance of respecting freedom of conscience and religion in challenging contexts.

### ***Transitional Justice***

On 16 January, the Commissioner was represented in Geneva at the Opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress on Enforced Disappearances, organised by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the NGO CEDI. His statement highlighted enforced disappearances and an enduring lack of truth and justice for the victims as longstanding serious human rights issue in Europe, aggravated by the war in Ukraine. He made five concrete [pledges](#) to continue playing his part toward ending enforced disappearances in Europe.

## **3. Human Rights Defenders**

In the reference period, the Commissioner continued to pay close attention to the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states, using the range of tools at his disposal, including public interventions on Azerbaijan and Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina), (see *Country focus*).

From 13 to 15 January, the Commissioner attended the 19<sup>th</sup> [Wilton Park annual Human Rights conference](#), which focused on improving the support and protection of human rights defenders, especially those working in a context of conflict or facing transnational repression. During the conference the Commissioner participated in a panel and delivered closing remarks.

On 20 February, the Commissioner published his first [Shout Out](#) entitled "US aid freeze is leaving a void. Europe must fill it". He described the negative impact of the USAID freeze on people living in Council of Europe member states, such as humanitarian consequences in Ukraine, and pressure on civil society, states and international organisations. He stressed the need to strengthen the role of member states in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and fill the void in resources and leadership.

On 8 April, the Commissioner [participated](#) in an exchange of views with the General Assembly of INGO Conference. Issues discussed included the protection of human rights defenders and civil society, the need for human rights to be at the heart of any path to peace in Ukraine and the human rights situation of Roma and Travellers.

## **4. Co-operation with national human rights structures**

On 30 January, in a speech delivered at the Irish Embassy in Paris on human rights oversight of artificial intelligence, the Commissioner drew attention to the key role of NHRs (see *Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights*).

On 17 February, in Brussels the Commissioner [met](#) the Directors of UNIA Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, to discuss the need to further strengthen Equality Bodies in order to better fight discrimination and promote equality.

On 25 February, the Commissioner delivered the [Annual Human Rights Lecture](#) at the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, entitled “Uphold the rule of law – resist the pushback” and met with the Chief Commissioner, Alyson Kilpatrick (see *Country focus*).

On 11 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with Anahit Manasyan, the Human Rights Defender (Ombuds) of Armenia. They discussed the human rights situation in Armenia.

On 26 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with the European Ombudsman, Teresa Anjinho, to discuss issues of common interest with human rights implications, including in the field of migration and artificial intelligence. They committed to continuing a constructive and mutually reinforcing cooperation between their institutions.

On 27 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with Ceslav Panico, People’s Advocate (Ombuds) of the Republic of Moldova. The Commissioner emphasised that the Moldovan authorities should ensure that People’s Advocate can exercise his independent human rights mandate free from interference and stressed that he looked forward to cooperating with him for the promotion of human rights in the country.

On 27 March, the Commissioner participated in the High-Level Conference for Ombudsperson Institutions and NHRIs organised by the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. In his [opening remarks](#) the Commissioner noted the crucial role of NHRs in the context of the incremental crisis of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. He welcomed the conference as an opportunity to strengthen mutual protection, to create a space for dialogue between institutions with shared purposes, and to increase co-operation between NHRs and the Council of Europe. The Commissioner repeated his commitments toward NHRs to seek all opportunities to collaborate, to continue to press for the establishment of NHRIs where they do not exist yet and to protect independent and effective NHRs when they are under attack because of their human rights work.

On 8 April, the Commissioner delivered a video message at the opening of the finals of the 2025 edition of the Slovak Human Rights Olympiad, an event aimed at secondary school students focusing on the promotion and protection of human rights, organised by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights. In the message, the Commissioner welcomed the event as an important opportunity to engage young people on human rights.

## 5. System of the European Convention on Human Rights

### ***Solemn Hearing for the Opening of the Judicial Year of the European Court of Human Rights***

On 31 January, the Commissioner attended the Solemn hearing for the Opening of the Judicial Year of the European Court of Human Rights, during which the President of the Court and the First President of the Court of Cassation of France addressed representatives from the highest courts of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe and from local, national and international authorities.

### ***Grand Chamber hearings in R.A. and Others v. Poland, H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia, and C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania***

On 12 February, the Commissioner [intervened](#) in three hearings before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *R.A. and Others v. Poland*, *H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia*,

and *C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania*, in which he encouraged the Court to use the opportunities of these cases to provide clear guidance on ensuring that non-refoulement obligations are honoured without exception.

The Commissioner put before the Court information about access to asylum and summary returns in each of the three respondent states and the human rights and humanitarian situation of those subjected to such returns to Belarus. More generally, the Commissioner highlighted the importance of not interpreting the case-law in a way that could render ineffective the Convention's protection against returning people to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, which is prohibited under Article 3 of the Convention.

As regards the prohibition of collective expulsions under Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention, the Commissioner commented on the current practice of member states interpreting the criteria set by the Court in its case-law in a way that may allow them not to carry out an individual examination of a person's circumstances before returning them.

He also set out how the instrumentalisation of migration might impact on the above-mentioned issues, noting that the challenges stemming from this phenomenon should be addressed in line with the long-standing principles set out by the Court.

## 6. Other meetings

### ***Meeting with Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the Turkish Litigation Support Project and the European Implementation Network***

On 27 January, the Commissioner met with a group of civil society organisations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the Turkish Litigation Support Project and the European Implementation Network. They discussed the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

### ***Meeting with the Chair of the Türkiye PACE delegation***

On 28 January, the Commissioner met with the Chair of the Türkiye PACE delegation, Yıldırım Tuğrul Türkeş. They exchanged on various legislative proposals being debated by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and their human rights implications, and some broader issues.

### ***Meeting with President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe***

On 28 January, the Commissioner met with Marc Cools, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, to exchange on a number of human rights issues including the situation in Georgia. The Commissioner discussed the preliminary findings following his visit to the country from 21 to 23 January.

### ***Meeting with Vice-President of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)***

On 28 January, the Commissioner met with Ucha Nanuashvili, Vice-President of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), to discuss among other things the situation of human rights in Europe.



***Meeting with former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe***

On 29 January, the Commissioner met with the former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tiny Kox, to discuss the situation of Ukrainian civilians, including children, missing or detained by Russia.

***Meeting with the Attorney General for England and Wales and Advocate General for Northern Ireland***

On 31 January, the Commissioner met with the Attorney General for England and Wales and Advocate General for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Lord Hermer KC. Among other issues, they discussed the rule of law situation in Europe, as well as the human rights aspects of migration policy and the UK government's approach to the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

***Meeting with the President of Open Society Foundations***

On 31 January, the Commissioner met online with Binaifer Nowrojee, President of Open Society Foundations. They exchanged on current challenges in the field of human rights.

***Meeting with the Chair of the European Implementation Network***

On 10 February, the Commissioner met with Maciej Nowicki, Chair of the European Implementation Network and his team. They discussed issues related to civil society's contribution to the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

***Meeting with the President of the UN Human Rights Council***

On 12 February, the Commissioner met with the President of the UN Human Rights Council, Ambassador Jürg Lauber. They discussed inter-institutional cooperation, including the potential for joint initiatives, closer engagement with Special Procedures, and mutual learning from review mechanisms. The Commissioner used the opportunity to highlight the importance of integrating human rights in Ukraine-related peace and reconstruction efforts.

***Meeting with Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland***

On 12 February, the Commissioner met with Henryka Mościcka-Dendys, Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. The Commissioner discussed, among other things, the human rights situation at the Poland-Belarus border.

***Mission to EU Institutions in Brussels***

From 18 to 20 February, the Commissioner carried out a mission to Brussels which was aimed at initiating high level dialogue with EU institutions. The key topics of the mission were migration, equality (including Roma and Travellers), the situation in Ukraine and the importance of human rights in the EU enlargement process. The Commissioner held exchanges with the European Parliament LIBE committee and DROI sub-committee. He [met](#) with Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, Hadja Lahbib and [engaged](#) with the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

### ***50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Community Law and Mediation Centre***

On 26 February, the Commissioner took part in a panel discussion at an event celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Community Law and Mediation Centre based in Dublin, Ireland. In his remarks, the Commissioner highlighted the role of communities as drivers of action on protecting human rights and social justice and stressed the importance of standing up for the human rights of the most vulnerable members of our societies, such as Roma and Travellers.

### ***Meeting with Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)***

On 3 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with the new Director of OSCE/ODIHR, Maria Telalian. They discussed the priorities for their respective mandates, ways to strengthen human rights protection across the region and to enhance cooperation between their institutions in addressing common challenges.

### ***Meeting with Minister of Justice of Poland***

On 11 March, the Commissioner met with Adam Bodnar, the Minister of Justice of Poland. The Commissioner raised his concerns about the changes in the Law on International Protection as shared with the Polish parliament in a letter (see *Country focus*).

### ***Meeting with Standing Committee on Local Government and Public Administration of the Norwegian Parliament***

On 11 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with members of the Standing Committee on Local Government and Public Administration of the Norwegian Parliament. They discussed key human rights issues in Europe, the situation of human rights institutions and civil society, as well as the importance of parliamentarians in protecting human rights.

### ***Meeting with the Commissioner of the International Commission Against the Death Penalty***

On 12 March, the Commissioner [met](#) with Marta Santos Pais, Commissioner of the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, and her team, who presented their current activities. The Commissioner stressed the importance of joining forces for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide.

### ***Meeting with Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy***

On 13 March, the Commissioner met online with Thomas Greminger, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy for an exchange on their respective work on Ukraine.

### ***Presentation of Annual Activity Report 2024***

Presenting his first annual report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 7 April, the Commissioner [underscored](#) the pressing need for national parliaments to reclaim their role as guardians of human rights. He urged members of parliaments to systematically check the human rights compliance of legislation and to enhance the visibility of human rights across parliamentary committees.

### ***Exchange of views with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe***

On 25 March, the Commissioner had an [exchange of views](#) with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, during which he focused on the vital role of local and regional governments in defending human rights. Drawing on his recent work, he highlighted the urgent need for grassroots action, the respect for international standards, and deeper partnerships to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

### ***Meeting with member of PACE and of Ireland's Senate***

On 8 April, the Commissioner met with Conor Murphy, member of PACE and of Ireland's Senate. They discussed issues related to the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

### ***Meeting with a member of the National Assembly of Serbia***

On 8 April the Commissioner met with Pavle Grbović, a member of the National Assembly of Serbia and President of the Movement of Free Citizens and discussed relevant human rights issues.

### ***Meeting with members of the Türkiye PACE delegation***

On 9 April, the Commissioner met with members of the Türkiye PACE delegation, Namık Tan, Aysun Bankoğlu, Gökçe Gökçen and Yunus Emre. They discussed relevant human rights issues pertaining to recent developments in the country.

### ***Meeting with member of PACE and of Ireland's Senate***

On 9 April, the Commissioner met with Senator Patricia Stephenson, member of PACE and of Ireland's Senate. They exchange on the human rights situation in Europe and in particular the situation of human rights defenders and the human rights of Roma and Travellers.

### ***Address to PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media***

On 10 April, the Commissioner addressed the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media on the issue of Ukrainian journalists held in Russian captivity. He expressed concern at the continuing detention of Ukrainian journalists by Russia. and set out points for the way forward: to insist on the release of the journalists and on access to them for the human rights monitoring mechanisms (in the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia); to demand accountability for the human rights violations perpetrated against these journalists; and to require that their release is part of the path to peace.

### ***Meeting with the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court and the Deputy Chairperson of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan***

On 10 April, the Commissioner met with the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan, Elvira Azimova and the Deputy Chairperson of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, Olga Perepechina. The Commissioner was informed about the human rights structure in Kazakhstan and recent legislative changes aimed at enhancing the protection of human rights in the country.

### ***Meeting with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities***

On 29 April, the Commissioner [met](#) with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Christophe Kamp. They discussed issues relating to national minorities where their mandates overlap, including embedding the voices and experiences of national minority women and girls in their work and explored ways to strengthen cooperation between their offices.

## **7. Communication and information work**

More than 775 news items were published on the Commissioner's work during the reporting period. The three most covered topics were freedom of assembly and of association, LGBTI people's rights, and the rights of Roma and Travellers. The media also extensively covered the work on migration, the visits to Georgia and to Greece, freedom of expression, and human rights defenders. Among the main national and international media outlets covering the work of the Commissioner featured the major news agencies such as *AFP*, *ANSA*, *Associated Press*, *EFE* and *Reuters*, as well as leading news outlets, including *Avvenire*, *Balkan Insight*, *BBC*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *Ekathimerini*, *Euractiv*, *Euronews*, *Evropeiskaya Pravda*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, *La Libre Belgique*, *La Repubblica*, *Mediapart*, *N1 Info*, *Politico*, *Radio Free Europe*, *RFI*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *SwissInfo*, *Telex.hu*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Irish Times*, and *Vatican News*.

More than 670 000 unique visitors visited the [website](#), with more than 2 300 000 page views. 89 posts were published on [X](#), generating a total of almost 200 000 impressions and an engagement rate of 6.5%. The number of followers increased, with more than 1 700 new followers.

The Commissioner's [LinkedIn](#) page had more than 2 000 followers, received more than 64 000 impressions and almost 2 000 reactions. More than 1 100 LinkedIn users subscribed to the [Newsletter](#), which is also distributed to more than 7 000 additional subscribers outside that platform.