

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

2ND PERIODIC ACTIVITY REPORT 2026

1 May to 31 August

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 of the Council of Europe, Michael O’Flaherty, between 1 May and 31 August 2026.

1. COUNTRY FOCUS

1.1 Visits and missions

Visit to Serbia

The Commissioner carried out a [visit](#) to Serbia from 18 to 21 May. The visit focused on issues pertaining to the right to freedom of expression, including media freedom, and to peaceful assembly, as well as the protection of civic space. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Prosecutor General, Zagorka Dolovac; the Protector of Citizens, Zoran Pašalić; and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Milan Antonijević. He also held meetings with representatives from civil society, the media and the academic community. The authorities cancelled the scheduled meetings with ministers, in which regard the Commissioner re-affirmed his commitment to dialogue.

The Commissioner noted that the situation had deteriorated since his previous visit in April 2025, with increasing reports of violence, intimidation and harassment against journalists and civil society actors critical of government policies. Against the backdrop of government-dominance of the media sector and the lack of a functioning media regulator, the rapidly shrinking space for dissent undermined political debate and access to diverse sources of information, which was especially problematic in the pre-electoral context.

The Commissioner was concerned about the safety of journalists and their families, and the lack of response by the police to attacks and threats, and the high number of SLAPPs targeting reporters, especially those covering the student protests and ongoing corruption investigations. He further observed a distorted media market in which state media funding and advertising are predominantly channelled to pro-government media.

The Commissioner noted with concern the authorities’ violent response to public gatherings and student-led demonstrations related to the tragedy in Novi Sad in November 2024. There were multiple reports of excessive force on the part of the police, and arrests of peaceful protestors, while substantiated complaints of unacceptable police behaviour appeared not to have been investigated or prosecuted. Despite the submission of testimonies of over 3000 citizens, no official investigation had been launched into the alleged sonic weapon attack of 15 March 2025. The Commissioner considered that the current climate of impunity for police malpractice had eroded social trust in law enforcement and other public authorities.

The Commissioner noted further that civil society organisations, particularly those working on human rights, anti-corruption, and election monitoring, were routinely portrayed as “traitors” or “foreign agents” in pro-government media, as well as by some high officials. He was concerned by how the high levels of hate speech targeting civil society could trigger physical violence. He further observed with concern how public demonstrations of respect for the victims of the Novi Sad tragedy reportedly could trigger dismissal from public employment, intimidation and harassment.

The Commissioner noted the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Venice Commission on the so-called Mrdić laws and of independent human rights institutions for the protection of human rights. More broadly, he was concerned about the polarisation within Serbia where human rights-related civil society and government cooperation mechanisms no longer appeared to function and called on the authorities to foster a favourable environment for free debate and public participation.

Visit to Romania

The Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to Romania from 26 to 29 May. The visit focused on the human rights situation of older persons living in long-term care facilities. During his visit, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Investments and European Projects and interim Minister of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity, Dragoş-Nicolae Pîslaru; the Secretary of State from the Ministry of Labour, Monica Dinică; the Secretary of State from the Ministry of Health, Stela Firu; representatives of the Office of the Prosecutor General; the People's Advocate, Renate Weber; the Executive Director of the Romanian Institute for Human Rights, Adrian Bulgaru; and representatives of civil society. He also visited three long-term care facilities in Bucharest and Voluntari, where he met with residents and staff members, as well as with representatives of the Bucharest authorities. After the visit, the Commissioner met online with members of the Romanian PACE delegation.

Against the background of Romania experiencing an ageing society, resulting in a growing demand for long-term support for older persons, the Commissioner acknowledged the efforts of the Romanian authorities to address the ensuing challenges, including with regard to the shortage of long-term residential, community-based and home care support services. He encouraged the authorities to ensure that private service providers, who deliver the majority of long-term care services, are able to access sustainable funding and operate without disproportionate administrative and fiscal burdens, while fully complying with quality standards and respecting the rights and dignity of those receiving care. He expressed concern about unlicensed care homes, where serious allegations of abuse and neglect have been reported and he called for rigorous implementation of the licensing framework, as well as a coordinated response to ensure accountability, including by effective investigations. The Commissioner further noted that independent monitoring of care institutions remains essential and called for strengthened support to the work of the People's Advocate (Ombudsman institution) and other oversight mechanisms, as well as to the civil society monitors.

The Commissioner welcomed the progress made in strengthening Romania's regulatory framework governing long-term care, including the adoption of improved quality standards for care services. He called on the authorities to strengthen coordination of the healthcare and social care sectors and for the development of capacity to respond to the multidisciplinary needs of older persons requiring long-term care. He also noted with appreciation the ongoing efforts to reform Romania's social protection and healthcare systems, including initiatives aimed at improving service financing and promoting a more human rights-based approach to care and encouraged the authorities to bring these reforms to completion and to ensure their effective implementation.

The Commissioner noted that it important to ensure that the most vulnerable persons, especially those in poverty, have meaningful access to long-term care and all necessary support services. Recognising older persons as rights holders and ensuring their participation as partners was key to ensuring full respect of their dignity in the context of long-term care. Considering the demographic challenges faced by Romania, the Commissioner was of the opinion that issues related to ageing, long-term care, and the rights of older persons overall should receive close attention at the highest political levels.

Following the visit, on 21 July the Commissioner published a letter to the Prime Minister of Romania on care homes for older persons (see below).

Visit to France

The Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to France from 8 to 16 June. The visit focused on the human rights situation of older persons living in long-term care facilities ('EHPADs'). During his visit, the Commissioner met with the Minister Delegate for Autonomy and People with Disabilities, Camille Galliard-Minier; the Defender of Rights, Claire Hédon; representatives of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council; the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights; the French National Advisory Ethics Council for Health and Life Sciences; the Council on Aging and the Assembly of French Departments; representatives of professional organisations and associations of older

persons and carers, as well as a journalist who had carried out an investigation into the sector. He also visited two care homes in Alsace, where he met residents and staff.

The Commissioner welcomed the commitment and professionalism of all those working in the sector whom he met, as well as the open and constructive attitude of the French authorities. He noted the efforts made since the shockwaves caused by the Orpéa scandal, which marked a turning point in collective awareness. This crisis prompted a re-evaluation by those working in the sector and the adoption of measures by the public authorities, notably the strengthening of inspections and checks in EHPADs. For the Commissioner, the situation in long-term care facilities remained a cause for concern. He noted that this general assessment is widely shared by residents and their families, carers, staff and their professional organisations, national human rights bodies, departmental councils and the state authorities themselves.

The Commissioner highlighted several areas of concern: care home residents usually appear to be regarded as objects of care rather than as full rights holders; due to a lack of recognition, the elderly care sector faces major difficulties in recruitment and staff retention, which has led to chronic understaffing and a high rate of workplace accidents; the budgets allocated to ensuring the proper functioning of facilities, adapting them to residents' needs and addressing climate change, as well as funding for independent living, remain insufficient; and the persistence of ageism in society. The combination of these factors has had significant consequences, including instances of abuse, undue restrictions on older persons' human rights, staff burnout and a crisis of public confidence in the sector.

The Commissioner identified five priority areas for improving the respect for human rights of older persons living in long-term care facilities. First, their recognition as individuals in their own right, with their freedom of choice and rights, such as the right to take risks, central to their care, while shifting away from a purely medical approach. Second, the need to elevate the status of professions in the sector by improving pay, training, and social recognition to address recruitment and retention challenges driven by demographic pressures. Third, the development of care home inspections with a need to carry out both documented reviews and unannounced on-site visits across public, private for-profit, and not-for-profit sectors. Fourth, the welcome focus on home and community-based care must go hand in hand with allocating sufficient resources to residential care homes to ensure they can uphold the dignity and rights of older persons. Finally, the clarification of the governance of the sector, including the division of responsibilities at all levels. He also noted that the National Conference on Independence, for which preparatory work has just begun, offers an opportunity to accelerate the process already underway. In addition to a change in terminology, concrete measures and the allocation of human and financial resources to enable their implementation are expected. The Commissioner called on the French authorities to draw on the support of professional organisations, trade unions, associations, national human rights bodies and consultative bodies, whose commitment he commended.

A [letter](#) to the French Minister for Autonomy and Persons with Disabilities following up on the visit was published after the end of the reporting period.

Visit to Bulgaria

The Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to Bulgaria from 29 June to 3 July. The visit focused on the human rights of older persons living in long-term care facilities and issues concerning the housing rights of Roma communities. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Velislava Petrova; the Minister of Justice, Nikolay Naydenov; the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Nataliya Efremova; the Minister of Health, Katya Ivkova; the Deputy Ministers of Regional Development and Public Works, Pavleta Pelovska and Desislava Georgieva; members of the National Delegation of Bulgaria to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and of the Commission on Human Rights, Religions and Citizens' Complaints of the National Assembly; the Ombudsman, Velislava Deltcheva; the Committee for Protection Against Discrimination; healthcare and social care professionals and civil society organisations. He also met with the Mayor of Varna, Blagomir Kotsev, and visited three long-term care facilities in and around Varna, where he met with residents and staff members and representatives of the local authorities.

The Commissioner welcomed the dedication of staff working in long-term care facilities and commended the authorities' efforts to modernise residential institutions and improve compliance with quality standards. He also welcomed the ongoing reform of the long-term care system, supported by policy and legislative developments designed to address population ageing and the growing demand for long-term care services. However, persistent staff shortages remain a significant challenge. The Commissioner noted concerns about the decline in geriatric expertise following the discontinuation of geriatrics as a specific medical specialisation. He was also informed of the limited availability of specialised dementia care and the lengthy waiting lists for persons requiring such services. The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to strengthen specialist geriatric expertise and expand dementia care and to continue addressing workforce shortages by improving working conditions, enhancing training opportunities and making the care professions more attractive to boost staff retention.

The Commissioner observed that residential care facilities face challenges in appropriately integrating the medical and social models of care, which can at times lead to a less personalised living environment for residents. He encouraged the authorities to strengthen coordination between healthcare and social care services to ensure a more integrated, person-centred approach that promotes residents' well-being in their daily lives.

Regarding the protection of residents' rights, the Commissioner welcomed the measures adopted in response to serious violations in unlicensed and private care institutions, including legislative amendments to tighten quality standards and inspections, the creation of reporting channels for residents, and a reinforced criminal law response to abuse. However, he noted the need for further measures to ensure adequate safety standards and for efforts to strengthen independent monitoring of long-term care facilities. He also noted that effective investigations into allegations of abuse, neglect and other violations of residents' rights remain essential, together with criminal accountability for those responsible.

The Commissioner observed that many individuals are still deprived of their legal capacity and placed under plenary guardianship, despite the authorities acknowledging the outdated nature of the legal framework. He encouraged the authorities to introduce supported decision-making arrangements that fully respect the autonomy, dignity and rights of the individuals concerned.

In respect of the situation of Roma communities, the Commissioner welcomed progress in promoting Roma inclusion, particularly regarding poverty reduction, social exclusion, and improved access to education and employment. He commended the work of Roma health mediators and welcomed legislative amendments enabling homeless persons and people living in informal dwellings to obtain address registration and identity documents. However, he remained concerned by the incidence of forced evictions, such as those affecting residents of the Zaharna Fabrika neighbourhood in Sofia in April 2025, an issue on which he has previously engaged with the Bulgarian authorities.

While the Commissioner welcomed the authorities' efforts to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, including in the case of *Yordanova and Others v. Bulgaria*, he noted that important issues remain unresolved. In particular, the absence of specific legislative provisions addressing proportionality assessment before evictions contributes to inconsistent administrative and judicial practice. The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to ensure that the National Housing Strategy currently under preparation adequately addresses the specific housing situation of Roma communities, including those living in informal settlements; to introduce explicit proportionality requirements for evictions and demolitions in legislation; and to intensify efforts to combat antigypsyism and consider replicating the successful model of Roma mediators in the housing sector.

Letters to the Bulgarian authorities following up on the visit are forthcoming.

1.2 Memoranda, letters and statements

Memorandum on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and administration of justice in Türkiye

On 26 May, the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and aspects of the administration of justice in Türkiye, following his visit to the country from 1 to 5 December 2025.

The Commissioner was concerned that domestic courts broadly interpret Criminal Code and Anti-Terrorism Law provisions to unduly restrict the expression of opinion and human rights advocacy. The European Court of Human Rights had found violations in various judgments against Türkiye where criminal liability was imposed for peaceful expression, political speech, or civil society activities, and where judicial decisions lacked adequate and individualised reasoning. He recommended amending relevant articles to ensure conformity with the Court's case-law and guidance by the Venice Commission, in particular the requirements of legality, foreseeability, and proportionality. He drew attention to the pressure that human rights defenders, journalists and independent media face from criminal investigations, arbitrary regulatory and administrative measures, especially when speaking out on legal and political developments in the country that affect human rights. He urged the authorities to ensure that all media and human rights defenders can work safely, free from reprisals or arbitrary interference. He called for the revision of Law Nos. 5651 (Internet) and 6112 (Broadcasting services) to ensure that all restrictions on online freedom of expression, such as access blocking, content removals, bandwidth throttling, are strictly necessary and subject to independent judicial oversight.

The Commissioner was concerned at the use of blanket bans and administrative restrictions on demonstrations, and allegations of excessive use of force by law enforcement in this context. Any restrictions should serve a legitimate aim, be necessary and proportionate, and should not be based on broad grounds like “public order” or “morality”, unless this is strictly justified and based on an individual assessment. All allegations of excessive use of force or arbitrary detention must be investigated to ensure accountability and redress. Highlighting the restrictive environment for civil society, the Commissioner asked the authorities to bring Law No. 3713 (Anti-Terrorism Law) and Law No. 7262 (on preventing financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction) into compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights and prevent the misuse of these laws against civil society. Closure or criminal proceedings against associations must only ever be a last resort, justified by convincing reasons and subject to effective judicial review. Concrete steps must be taken to enable and safeguard a vibrant civil society, including organisations defending the rights of women, minorities, and LGBTI people, ensuring they can operate and cooperate internationally without fear of reprisal.

The Commissioner noted persistent challenges regarding judicial independence, prosecutorial practice, fair trial guarantees, the situation of lawyers, and the execution of Constitutional Court judgments. He called for a reform of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (CJP) in line with European standards, to ensure that it is free from executive interference, and that its powers regarding recruitment, promotions, transfers and disciplinary proceedings are exercised based on objective criteria and a transparent process. The Commissioner was concerned that bar associations in Türkiye had been facing obstacles impeding their ability to fulfil their role, and that lawyers have increasingly been restricted in performing their professional duties. Lawyers and bar associations help to ensure effective access to justice, the protection of human rights, and the proper functioning of the justice system and should be able to operate independently and safely. He called on Türkiye to implement all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights without further delays.

The Commissioner also encouraged Türkiye to strengthen the human rights protection by rejoining the Istanbul Convention to bridge the protection gap regarding violence against women, ratify the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, and reform the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) to ensure its independence in compliance with the UN Paris Principles.

The comments of the Turkish authorities on the memorandum are available on the Commissioner's website.

Memorandum on violence against women in Armenia

On 27 May, the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on violence against women (VAW) in Armenia, following his visit to the country from 3 to 5 February.

While welcoming the authorities' willingness to address VAW, the Commissioner identified gaps in law enforcement and survivor protection. Legislative reforms marked clear progress, notably the 2024 amendments to the 2017 Law on Domestic Violence and the 2022 Criminal Code, alongside the introduction of new tools to better protect women and girls such as police and court protection orders and the establishment of support services. A new Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2028 also represented a useful roadmap. Armenia's advance in global gender indices further reflected these positive steps.

However, issues remained with implementation. Law enforcement and the judiciary reportedly prioritise family reconciliation and "restoring peace within the family" over addressing the needs of survivors. Interaction with the authorities is sometimes re-traumatising for survivors who face victim-blaming and fear of retaliation from the perpetrators. Emergency protection orders are inconsistently issued and enforced.

Operational gaps also persisted. A unified, state-supported 24/7 national helpline is lacking. Shelters and regional support centres for survivors faced funding shortages, rely on private donors, and lack the capacity to represent survivors in legal proceedings and to accommodate vulnerable groups, particularly in remote or rural communities. Misinformation around the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating VAW and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and anti-gender campaigns mobilising myths about the Convention continue to stall its ratification.

The Commissioner recommended the following set of key actions to bridge the gap between law and practice. First, ratify the Istanbul Convention without any further delay and without reservations; carry out public awareness campaigns to counter misinformation, and consider introducing a stand-alone domestic violence offence; introduce a reliable compensation mechanism for survivors of VAW; establish a state-funded compensation scheme for cases where perpetrators lack the means to pay. Second, institutionalise mandatory, survivor-centred and trauma-informed training for law enforcement, judicial and other professionals dealing with survivors; further reform police and judicial procedures to ensure effective protection orders, including sanctions for violations of these orders; regularly review and adapt survivor protection protocols to minimise trauma and guarantee support for all survivors; continue developing the national database on domestic violence to enable proper individual risk assessment, analysis, and evidence-based policymaking. Finally, expand the number of shelters and regional support centres in line with the Council of Europe standards and increase their funding as needed; ensure access to them for all vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities, children, older women, and women belonging to minorities; provide shelters with state-supported security and transport; establish a unified, state-supported 24/7 national helpline for survivors of VAW; ensure timely access to legal aid for survivors of VAW at every stage of proceedings.

The comments of the Armenian authorities on the memorandum are available on the Commissioner's website.

Social media post on investigations into police misconduct in Serbia

On 10 June, the Commissioner [raised](#) concerns about reports that criminal proceedings for serious police misconduct against a female student during the July 2025 Belgrade protests were to be discontinued. He noted that this risked further undermining trust in law enforcement and reinforcing the climate of impunity.

Statement on the instrumentalisation of criminal acts in the United Kingdom

On 12 June, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concern regarding the instrumentalisation of criminal acts that spur racist hate in the United Kingdom. Speaking after a stabbing incident in Belfast, he welcomed national and regional authorities' commitment to taking measures to address online amplification of racist and violent rhetoric. This should include steps to ensure social media platforms take responsibility for countering hate speech, as well as enhancing oversight. The Commissioner called on politicians, media and others in positions of influence to act responsibly and to ensure that their contributions to the public debate aim to diffuse tension, rather than to stoke division. He expressed concern that these heinous crimes are being misused to call into question non-discrimination and other human rights protections. These are a cornerstone of democratic societies, and chipping away at them would make everyone in the UK more unsafe.

Memorandum on the human rights of Karabakh Armenians displaced to Armenia

On 16 June, the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on the human rights of Karabakh Armenians displaced to Armenia, following his visit to Armenia from 3 to 5 February.

The Commissioner welcomed the initial response of the Armenian authorities to the displacement of Karabakh Armenians and made recommendations as the situation transitions from an emergency phase to long-term integration. He noted positive steps taken by the authorities, including efforts to facilitate access to Armenian citizenship and dedicated support programmes. By February 2026, more than 20,000 Karabakh Armenians had obtained Armenian citizenship, with no applications processed by that date having been rejected. Temporary protection status remains available to those who have not yet acquired citizenship. The government supported the purchase of residential property, provided rental subsidies, and ensured that displaced pupils are enrolled in schools at the same rate as the general population. Employment and entrepreneurship programmes have complemented these initiatives.

However, the Commissioner noted that many Karabakh Armenians are still struggling to access full rights and opportunities in Armenia. Many Karabakh Armenians remain without Armenian citizenship, which limits their access to certain benefits and rights. The difficulties they face in restoring identity and other documents hinder their access to pensions, employment, education, and housing. Although housing support is significant, it remains limited for many due to the disparity between the cost of property in areas offering viable employment prospects and the level of support available. The recent reduction in monthly rental subsidies has caused concern within the displaced community. He also noted the lack of a comprehensive integration strategy and the insufficient consultation with Karabakh Armenians on policies that affect their lives.

Drawing on his recent memorandum on violence against women in Armenia (see above), the Commissioner noted that displaced women face heightened risks of violence as well as increased social and economic pressures, including those related to gender, marriage, reproduction and caregiving.

The right to return to the Karabakh region remains of importance to Karabakh Armenians. In the context of the ongoing peace process and its related sensitivities, the Commissioner invited the Armenian authorities to ensure that Karabakh Armenians are fully informed and supported in making free choices regarding their future.

The Commissioner's recommendations to the Armenian authorities included adopting a comprehensive, human rights-based integration strategy, in consultation with Karabakh Armenians; monitoring and adapting integration measures to meet the evolving needs of Karabakh Armenians, especially housing support and financial assistance, with particular attention to those belonging to vulnerable groups; continuing to simplify and facilitate access to citizenship and the restoration of documents, and extending temporary protection as long as needed; and strengthening protection and support services for displaced women and girls.

The comments of the Armenian authorities on the memorandum are available on the Commissioner's website.

Memorandum on accountability of law enforcement and freedoms of assembly, association and expression in Georgia

On 19 June, the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on accountability of law enforcement and freedoms of assembly, association and expression in Georgia, following his visit to the country on 14 and 15 April.

The Commissioner acknowledged the recently announced criminal charges against five police officers for the use of disproportionate force against protesters and journalists in 2024 and early 2025. However, given that the Public Defender received ill-treatment reports from 360 protesters, the Commissioner expressed concern about the substantial delays and the limited progress made to date. He underlined the importance of implementing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning effective and independent investigations into allegations of ill-treatment and the policing of demonstrations.

The Commissioner called on authorities to ensure a thorough, independent and transparent inquiry into the reported use of water cannons containing chemical substances against protesters, with the participation of victims and civil society, and public disclosure of the findings. He noted that, rather than reviewing existing restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the Georgian authorities adopted further limitations in October and December 2025. These include a mandatory prior notification requirement for any assembly, including spontaneous protests, new police powers to restrict protesters from impairing road or pedestrian traffic, expanded administrative sanctions, and criminal liability for repeated protest-related administrative offences. The amendments significantly restrict the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and appear incompatible with the principles of necessity and proportionality enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Commissioner expressed concern about the chilling effect of several laws relating to 'foreign influence' on civil society organisations (CSOs), human rights defenders and journalists. He called for the repeal of the Foreign Agents Registration Law, which requires legal and natural persons to register as 'agents of a foreign principal' and of the wide-ranging amendments to the Law on Grants, which prohibit CSOs from receiving foreign funding without official permission. The authorities should also halt the administrative and criminal proceedings against dozens of CSOs for receiving foreign funding or for alleged involvement in aggravated sabotage, and immediately lift the freeze on their bank accounts. He considered that ongoing legal actions targeting opposition parties and politicians appear to be inconsistent with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Commissioner warned that restrictions on freedom of expression, including the ban on foreign funding for media outlets and the cumulative effect of amendments to defamation law, risk driving journalists towards self-censorship.

The comments of the Georgian authorities on the memorandum are available on the Commissioner's website.

Letter to the Prosecutor General of Azerbaijan on the criminal case against journalist Afgan Sadigov

On 9 July, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Prosecutor General of Azerbaijan, Kamran Aliyev, seeking clarification regarding the criminal proceedings against journalist Afgan Sadigov, who was arrested on 8 June 2026 and subsequently remanded in pre-trial detention. In 2024, Georgian authorities arrested Mr Sadigov based on an Azerbaijani extradition request related to criminal charges of extortion. Following an indication from the European Court of Human Rights that he should not be removed to Azerbaijan, the Georgian authorities released him on bail on 16 April 2025. After Azerbaijani authorities terminated the criminal case on 1 April 2026, Mr Sadigov was deported back to Azerbaijan on 5 April 2026. In his letter, the Commissioner referred to his earlier [letter](#) to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, asking for the immediate release of all human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists imprisoned for their legitimate work or for expressing dissenting or critical opinions, and for all related criminal charges to be dropped.

The reply of the Prosecutor General of Azerbaijan is available on the Commissioner's website.

Social media post on planned evictions of Roma in Lozenets, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

On 17 July, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concerns about reports of a planned eviction of Roma in Lozenets, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. He called on authorities to uphold human rights including proportionality and ensure adequate housing policies.

Letter to the Prime Minister of Romania on care homes for older persons

On 21 July, following his visit to Romania in May (see above), the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Prime Minister of Romania, Ilie Bolojan. The Commissioner welcomed progress in social service reform and the dedication of staff working in care homes for older persons. He expressed concern about several challenges, including the insufficient recognition of residents as fully-fledged right holders, shortages in services, and difficulties vulnerable individuals face in accessing care. The Commissioner recommended further developing the care system to address complex needs and to better integrate social and healthcare services. Regarding oversight, he recommended that care home inspections focus more on the wellbeing and rights of residents in addition to formal compliance with standards. He noted the need for adequate and sustainable funding so that providers can deliver care in line with needs and at appropriate standards. The Commissioner drew attention to unlicensed care homes, calling for a thorough and independent investigation into the Dumbrava village case. He recommended that authorities enforce licensing requirements more strictly, implement necessary legislative changes, and strengthen monitoring, including by increasing support for the People's Advocate, as well as establishing accessible channels for residents to raise concerns and seek remedies, and supporting NGOs which promote their human rights and dignity.

The reply of the Interim Minister of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity of Romania is available on the Commissioner's website.

Statement concerning the legal proceedings against Ekrem İmamoğlu, Türkiye

On 10 July, the Commissioner [raised](#) concerns about developments in the criminal proceedings against Ekrem İmamoğlu, the elected mayor of Istanbul, and over 400 other defendants in the case concerning the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. These proceedings raise grave issues regarding the right to a fair trial, including the principle of equality of arms, and the independence of the judiciary. Reports indicate severe restrictions during these and other proceedings against Mr İmamoğlu, including limited access to key documents and evidence, barring defenders and observers from the courtroom, and witness statements being retracted after allegedly having been obtained under pressure. Furthermore, separate investigations have been opened against Mr İmamoğlu for remarks he made in court, accusing him of insulting and threatening public officials. The Commissioner was also concerned about allegations of ill-treatment during detention, including reports of degrading treatment and threats. He called on the authorities to ensure that all proceedings against Mr İmamoğlu and the other defendants fully comply with Articles 3, 5, and 6 of the ECHR, guaranteeing protection against ill-treatment, ensuring that pre-trial detention is only used as an exceptional measure, and respecting fair trial rights, including ensuring that all defendants are given a genuine opportunity to present their defence and be heard in full as the case continues, and upholding the presumption of innocence throughout the criminal process.

Letters to ministers responsible for migration policy in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands on return hubs

On 16 July, the Commissioner published [letters](#) to the ministers responsible for migration policy in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands to ensure that any plans for 'return hubs' align with international human rights law. The five governments had expressed intentions to launch joint initiatives to establish return hubs outside the EU. Drawing from the findings of his [September 2025 report](#), in which he warned that sending people to return hubs would present considerable human rights risks, the Commissioner proposed four core 'guardrails', based on international human rights law and standards. First, any initiative to establish return hubs should be preceded by a

comprehensive assessment of direct and indirect human rights risks. This assessment should be based on a rigorous factual and legal analysis and lead to a plan to prevent, mitigate or remedy those risks. Second, if member states proceed with return hubs, they should ensure these are subject to adequate, independent and continuous human rights monitoring, with robust review and suspension mechanisms. Third, co-operation on return hubs should be based on legally binding agreements that feature enforceable human rights clauses. Fourth, parliamentary, public and judicial scrutiny should be made possible by making risk assessments, mitigation plans, monitoring outcomes and agreements public.

The replies of the Federal Minister of the Interior of Austria, Gerhard Karner; the Minister for Immigration and Integration of Denmark, Morten Bødskov; the Federal Minister of the Interior of Germany, Alexander Dobrindt; the Minister for Migration and Asylum of Greece, Thanos Plevris; and the Minister of Asylum and Migration and Deputy Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Bart Van den Brink, are available on the Commissioner's website.

Memorandum on child poverty in Italy

On 23 July, the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on child poverty in Italy, following his visit to the country from 12 to 16 January.

Child poverty impacts every aspect of a child's life and wellbeing, restricting access to health, education, adequate nutrition, housing, and social relations. It is compounded by limited social mobility, which traps disadvantaged groups and perpetuates inequalities across generations. The Commissioner noted that structural reforms, coordinated action and sustained funding are required to safeguard the rights of the country's children. While appreciating the efforts made by the Italian authorities to address the issue, the Commissioner observed that measures should be strengthened through a coherent nationwide approach that is human rights-based and child centred. He called on the authorities at all levels to prioritise the eradication of child poverty in their public expenditure.

Children are now the most poverty-stricken age group in Italy, with 13,8% of them – roughly 1 in 7 children – living in absolute poverty. This figure has risen in recent years, driven by unadjusted salaries and the mounting cost-of-living, which has particularly affected families. The child poverty situation in Italy is marked by significant disparities along geographic lines, with poverty particularly concentrated in the south, in peripheral areas, and in disadvantaged urban areas. Absolute poverty is more prevalent in single parent families and those with three or more children, as well as in households where adults have low levels of education, are foreigners, or are Roma.

The Commissioner observed that efforts must be designed to assist children living in poverty and their families, paying attention to the needs of children in situations of particular disadvantage. While welcoming initiatives such as the *Assegno Unico e Universale* (Single and Universal Allowance) introduced in 2021, he noted that overall, funding for key poverty-alleviation programmes is insufficient and decreasing, including in areas identified as particularly crucial such as educational poverty. In view of the expiration of EU funds linked to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, sustained funding should be ensured for the operation of school and nursery facilities and for initiatives that guarantee free meals for children in need and those that counter school dropouts.

The Commissioner observed that safeguards should be introduced to ensure that children and households living in poverty are not excluded from relevant allowances and services as a result of residency or citizenship requirements, technological or bureaucratic barriers. He encouraged Italian authorities at all levels to coordinate all child poverty initiatives under a single, human rights-based national plan; introduce legislative measures to define and fund minimum levels of public social services that every region and municipality should provide, to reduce regional disparities; ensure that income-support allowances are sufficient to provide an adequate standard of living and do not exclude people who cannot support themselves; ensure coordination of social services to provide comprehensive care to children, addressing the multiple manifestations of child poverty and eliminating any legal and administrative barriers that may exclude children from accessing adequate housing, nutrition, social assistance and psychological care; and secure sustained budgetary allocations to enable the implementation of relevant

measures – including after the expiration of EU funds linked to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan – as well as of specific programmes for children living with disadvantages.

The comments of the Italian authorities on the memorandum are available on the Commissioner's website.

1.3 Meetings with authorities

Meeting with the Minister of Justice of Georgia

On 5 May, the Commissioner met online with Paata Salia, Minister of Justice of Georgia. They discussed human rights developments in Georgia.

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine

On 2 June, the Commissioner met online with Ilona Havronska, Deputy Minister for European Integration in the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine. They discussed protection and support for Ukrainians displaced across Europe.

Meeting with the Secretary of State for Justice of Monaco

On 3 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Samuel Vuelta Simon, Secretary of State for Justice of Monaco, in Strasbourg. They discussed the need to support and raise awareness of the role of the European Convention on Human Rights and the work of the Court.

Meeting with the Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Monaco

On 3 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Christophe Robino, Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Monaco, in Strasbourg. They discussed children's mental health and social media, and the need to seek solutions that respect the dignity of young people.

Meeting with the Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Monaco

On 22 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Christophe Mirmand, Minister of State and Isabelle Berro-Amadeï, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Monaco, in Strasbourg. They exchanged on current human rights challenges in Europe and the Principality's priorities for their presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

Meeting with the Human Rights Ambassador of the Netherlands

On 5 August, the Commissioner [met](#) with Wim Geerts, Human Rights Ambassador of the Netherlands, in the margins of the WorldPride Human Rights Conference in Amsterdam. They discussed human rights developments in Europe.

2. PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

The following section contains a brief description of the main activities of the Commissioner organised by thematic areas, during the period in question.

2.1 Impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on human rights

Throughout the period under review, the Commissioner continued to react to Russia's deadly attacks on civilians in Ukraine. On 15 May, he [reacted](#) to the attacks on civilian infrastructure that resulted in the Kyiv apartment building collapse. On 25 May, the Commissioner [condemned](#) Russia's use of long-range missiles on civilian targets that cause great human suffering and terrorise the population. On 2 July, the Commissioner [condemned](#) the escalating violence and attacks against civilians in Ukraine, deploring the deadly consequences. On 6 July, after another night of attacks with heavy civilian casualties, the Commissioner [said](#) that a ceasefire and a process toward durable peace grounded in human rights are urgently needed. On 30 July, he [called](#) for urgent support from the international community to protect civilians in Ukraine. On 5 August, the Commissioner [deplored](#) the new series of attacks targeting civilian infrastructure. On 20 August, following a deadly strike on Kyiv, he [called](#) for urgent action to support Ukraine in protecting its people and their human rights.

During the reference period, the Commissioner worked to keep human rights centred pathways to peace and recovery on the international political agenda in his continued cooperation with Council of Europe and international partners (see *Engagement with Council of Europe Institutions: others; External cooperation and complementarity*).

On 12 May, the Commissioner published his Shout Out '[Safeguarding Ukrainians displaced across Europe](#)', which addressed the continued need for protection and support for Ukrainians displaced by Russia's ongoing war. Despite the EU's extension of temporary protection until March 2027, growing fatigue, fragmented national policies and reductions in assistance risk creating protection gaps, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, single parents, older persons and persons with disabilities. The Commissioner noted that international protection can only be withdrawn when conditions for return to Ukraine are safe and durable and warned against measures that could go against the principle of non-refoulement. He also referred to the need to move from emergency measures towards long-term stability by ensuring secure legal status, access to local language classes, education and reskilling, access to the labour market, secure housing and family reunification. Greater European solidarity was considered essential to prevent persons displaced by the war from being left without adequate protection and access to rights.

On 18 May, the Commissioner met with Oleksandra Matviichuk, Head of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Ukrainian organisation Centre for Civil Liberties, in Strasbourg. They discussed the human rights situation in Ukraine and how to incorporate human rights in pathways to peace in Ukraine.

On 6 June, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the 2026 Global Ukrainian Summit in Bern, Switzerland. He focused on the situation of Ukrainians displaced across Europe and noted that, while European countries had responded positively in 2022 by activating temporary protection, the situation had become increasingly uncertain four years later. He expressed concerns about the growing intensity of the war, alongside a diminishing welcome for Ukrainians in some European countries, compounded by increasing anti-migrant and far-right populist narratives. He noted that there were no genuinely safe areas in Ukraine and warned against sweeping exclusions from temporary protection and premature ending of such protection that could disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including pensioners, people without a certain level of income, and persons with disabilities. The Commissioner identified five priorities for future action: ensuring that policies on protection and return were evidence-based; promoting transparency in government decision-making; ensuring full compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law; consulting Ukrainian communities in host countries and protecting the most vulnerable members of these communities.

On 9 June, in his [speech](#) at the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission annual conference on 'Women forging lasting peace. Dismantling barriers to gender-inclusive conflict resolution and peacebuilding' in Strasbourg, the Commissioner expressed concern that women continued to be excluded from major peace negotiations and spoke about the need to recognise Ukrainian women's contributions to peacebuilding as highlighted in his 2025 [memorandum](#) on human rights elements for peace in Ukraine (see *Other thematic work*).

On 26 June, at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdansk, Poland, the Commissioner chaired a panel on “Social Recovery as a Core Pillar of Ukraine’s Recovery: Investing in People, Participation and Return”. He presented his [Observations](#) on safeguarding Ukrainians displaced across Europe. The Observations came amid a debate over diminishing support for displaced Ukrainians, including the potential phasing out or restriction of the EU’s temporary protection arrangements, alongside individual member states’ rollbacks. As of March 2026, more than 4.3 million people displaced from Ukraine were under temporary protection in the EU alone, with hundreds of thousands more residing in non-EU Council of Europe member states. The Commissioner expressed concern about the mounting pressure to prematurely end temporary protection arrangements and restrict access for specific groups, such as men of conscription age and individuals from regions of Ukraine deemed safe. Other worrying trends across Europe included reductions in social support, policies promoting premature returns, and rising anti-Ukrainian sentiment in host countries. He noted that blanket restrictions on temporary protection for specific categories of people raise human rights concerns. The Commissioner emphasised that no part of Ukraine can currently be considered safe; with civilian casualties in 2025 and in recent months having reached their highest levels since 2022. Missile and drone attacks continue to strike civilian targets across the country, including western regions far from the front line. He also noted that issues related to military service could trigger protection claims, and member states must ensure access to individualised assessments. The Commissioner called on states to: ensure continuity of protection for as long as necessary, through the extension of temporary protection or alternative legal statuses, until conditions in Ukraine permit a safe, dignified and durable return, in accordance with international refugee law and human rights obligations; avoid unsafe or premature returns by refraining from policies such as cuts to social assistance or barriers to accessing protection, that leave displaced persons with no real choice but to leave host countries or live in limbo; guarantee protection without discrimination based on employment status, duration of stay or other factors; explicitly address the needs of vulnerable groups, including older persons, single caregiver women, children, persons with disabilities, and those from temporarily occupied territories; maintain access to national individualised asylum procedures if transitions or restrictions are introduced to collective temporary protection schemes; and initiate planning for future returns, ensuring that all returns are voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed. States should cooperate to plan for long-term reconstruction, property compensation or restitution, and social cohesion for when safe and durable returns become viable.

On 28 August, during the Ukraine Recovery Lab session on ‘Vision building – preferred future for Ukrainian recovery’ at the European Forum Alpbach, the Commissioner [noted](#) that reconstruction in Ukraine cannot wait for the conflict to end and explained why a human rights-based approach is essential to honour human dignity throughout recovery and reconstruction.

2.2 Embedding human rights in the great issues of the day

2.2.1 Migration (human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants)

During the reporting period, the Commissioner’s focus in this area was mainly on human rights in externalised settings. His work included country-specific work, notably in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands (see *Country focus: Memoranda, letters and statements*).

On 18 and 19 June, the Commissioner brought together a group of experts in Brussels to discuss human rights risk assessments in externalised settings, as follow-up to his [2025 report](#) on *Externalised asylum and migration policies and human rights law*.

On 23 June, the Commissioner [spoke](#) at the high-level launch of the report by Gehad Madi, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants on “Externalization of migration governance: new trends and specific aspects” in Geneva. He also had a bilateral exchange with the Special Rapporteur.

On 20 July, the Commissioner published an [op-ed](#) in The Guardian entitled ‘Europe is at risk of creating a human rights black hole with its ‘return hubs’ for migrants’. He examined the European Union’s move towards establishing

offshore migration 'return hubs' under the proposed new return regulation, arguing that these centres risk repeating the human rights failures associated with previous attempts to outsource migration management. He noted that several EU member states were preparing to establish joint return hubs. The Commissioner noted evidence from European cooperation with Libya and Tunisia, where migrants and asylum seekers had reportedly faced arbitrary detention, inhumane conditions, abuse, limited access to legal assistance, refoulement and other serious rights violations. He also referred to the difficulties experienced in the context of certain European externalisation initiatives, emphasising that transferring migration procedures outside national territory could make access to courts, lawyers and effective remedies more difficult. The Commissioner questioned whether the proposed EU return hubs would be effective, noting that they could require significant public funding while remaining vulnerable to legal challenges and potentially damaging Europe's international credibility. He concluded that governments should not rely on general assurances that human rights obligations would be respected but should establish robust safeguards before implementation. These safeguards should include comprehensive human rights risk assessments; clear access to complaints mechanisms and courts; independent and continuous monitoring of conditions; mechanisms to immediately suspend cooperation when serious violations were identified; legally binding and judicially enforceable human rights provisions in agreements with host countries; and full public disclosure of assessments, agreements and monitoring reports.

On 31 July, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concern about the situation in Ceuta, Spain, at the border with Morocco, following the irregular crossing of the border by thousands of people. He regretted the loss of lives and expressed solidarity with first responders mobilised to address the situation. On 4 August, the Commissioner [reiterated](#) that human rights law must be respected in tackling migration related challenges. He underlined that access to asylum procedures should be ensured to those who request it and that solidarity among states is key to deliver effective and sustainable migration policies.

2.2.2 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human rights

On 28 March, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* ('Magnificent Humanity') on the need to 'disarm' artificial intelligence. In an article entitled "'Disarming AI' to defend human dignity: Seven principles for effective oversight' published on LinkedIn, the Commissioner called for citizens, tech titans, and governments, to engage in one of the most consequential moments in modern history. He noted that effective AI oversight requires a broad approach covering the public and private sectors, as well as security and military uses. Regulation should address the full range of risks to human rights and well-being, including privacy, freedom of expression, equality, discrimination, disinformation and harmful content. Oversight must continue throughout the entire AI lifecycle, from development through deployment, with regular testing and auditing. Strong and well-resourced oversight bodies are also needed, with sufficient expertise and cooperation across borders. People affected by AI systems must have clear rights, accessible ways to challenge decisions, and effective remedies when harm occurs. Human control and accountability must remain central, particularly in high-stakes decisions involving life, liberty and equality. Finally, AI systems must be sufficiently transparent and explainable, with access to information about their models, data and performance so that they can be properly monitored and held accountable.

2.2.3 Environment and human rights

On 4 May, the Commissioner [called](#) on Council of Europe member states to co-sponsor the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution on the 'Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change'. Strong political will was needed to turn legal frameworks and scientific knowledge into action. The Commissioner noted that dependency on fossil fuels threatens global stability and negatively impacts human rights and that current conflicts highlight the need for a fair and inclusive transition to renewable energy that leaves no one behind.

On 21 May, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) the adoption of the UNGA Resolution endorsing the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on state obligations in respect of climate change and commended Vanuatu and the Core

Group for their leadership. He noted that its adoption was a powerful commitment to the rule of law, human rights and urgent collective action and that, as climate change accelerates, states must comply with their obligations, turning commitments into ambitious, science-based action that leaves no one behind.

On 2 June, the Commissioner [underlined](#) the gravity of the environmental crisis and the need for a legally binding Council of Europe instrument recognising the right to a healthy environment. Speaking at an event organised by the Campaign for the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment at the Council of Europe with the Center for International Environmental Law in Strasbourg, he highlighted that this step would advance human rights across the continent.

On the same day, the Commissioner [met](#) with Astrid Puentes Riaño, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to a Healthy Environment, in Strasbourg. They discussed ways to advance recognition of this vital right at international, regional and national levels.

On 4 June, at the 1st European Forum for Environmental Human Rights Defenders, held in Strasbourg, the Commissioner [joined](#) the call for a Council of Europe legally binding instrument on the right to a healthy environment, noting that a binding legal instrument would address the urgency of the moment while reinforcing the human rights toolbox. The Commissioner observed the interconnectedness of attacks on the environment and impacts on human wellbeing across diverse contexts, from environmental damage caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine to Roma settlements located near toxic waste sites, and older people fearing extreme weather events. He noted how states sometimes suppressed peaceful protest and powerful lobbies resisted business accountability. The Commissioner emphasised that such attacks disproportionately affected women and girls and committed to work with young environmental human rights activists.

In the margins of the Forum, the Commissioner exchanged with environmental human rights defenders and civil society actors. He [commended](#) their courage in exposing environmental harm, reminding states of the obligation to ensure they can work freely and safely.

2.2.4 *Inequality (child poverty)*

During the reference period, the Commissioner's work in this area included the publication of a memorandum on child poverty in Italy (see *County focus*).

2.3 [Forgotten people](#)

2.3.1 *Protecting the human rights of older persons in long-term care institutions*

During the reporting period, the human rights of older persons in long-term care institutions were the subject of country-specific work, notably in Romania, France and Bulgaria (see *Country focus*).

On 17 June, the Commissioner held [meetings](#) on this topic in Brussels with Stefaan Vercamer, President of the European Seniors' Union and with Maciej Kucharczyk, President of AGE Platform Europe. The discussions focused on the importance of dignity, autonomy and person-centred care.

On 23 June, he met in Geneva with Zvezdan Pirtošek, UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (see *External cooperation and complementarity*).

The Commissioner's thematic publication on the protection of the human rights of older persons in long-term care institutions is under preparation.

2.3.2 Human rights of Roma and Travellers

During the reporting period, the human rights of Roma and Travellers were the subject of country-specific work, notably in Bulgaria (see *Country focus*) and Greece (see *System of the European Convention on Human Rights*).

On 16 May, Roma Resistance Day, the Commissioner [honoured](#) the Roma who resisted at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. He noted how their courage lives on in every Roma rights defender fighting for dignity and justice across Europe today. He called on all to challenge antigypsyism and unite to build a world where everyone is equal in dignity and rights.

On 18 June, International Day for Countering Hate Speech, the Commissioner [congratulated](#) the winners of the CoE Journalism Excellence Award noting that ethical reporting plays an essential role in challenging antigypsyism and discrimination faced by Roma and Travellers across Europe.

On 17-19 June, in the margins of the No Hate Speech Week in Strasbourg, the Commissioner's travelling exhibition accompanying his book *The Unheard 12 Million* was on display at the Council of Europe.

On 2 August, on Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, the Commissioner [honoured](#) the over 500,000 Sinti and Roma murdered during the Holocaust in WWII. He called for the defence of truth over denial and reaffirmed 'Never Again'. He noted that remembrance demands action: investing in memorialisation, protecting human rights, and combating persistent antigypsyism.

2.4 Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society

In the reference period, the Commissioner continued to pay close attention to the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states.

The Commissioner addressed the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states through country-specific interventions, including public interventions on Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye (see *Country focus: Memoranda, letters and statements*) and through exchanges and meetings with a wide range of partners.

In addition, on 4 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Andrea Bolaños Vargas, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, in Strasbourg. They discussed the deteriorating environment for Europe's human rights defenders, including funding shortages, crackdown and harassment, and restrictive laws.

On 4 June, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the 1st European Forum for Environmental Human Rights Defenders, held in Strasbourg. In the margins of the Forum, the Commissioner exchanged with environmental human rights defenders and civil society actors (see *Embedding human rights in the great issues of the day: Environment and human rights*).

3. OTHER THEMATIC WORK

As regards *human rights of LGBTI people*, on 19 May, in a [video address](#) to the IDAHOT+ Forum in Copenhagen, the Commissioner highlighted the broader pushback on human rights, and the need to support civil society. He called on all state actors to re-engage, show leadership and determination in addressing the discrimination and exclusion against LGBTI people that remains across Europe.

On 17 July, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concern at reports that the Oradea Pride March 2026 would again be prevented in Romania. He called on the authorities to engage with organisers, enable a safe and appropriate route, and protect participants, while noting that freedom of assembly belongs to everyone.

On 27 July, the Commissioner [deplored](#) the deadly attack at Berlin Pride. He noted that Prides across Europe are facing violence, intimidation and restrictions and called on all to defend equality and answer hatred with solidarity.

On 3 August, in an [op-ed](#) in the EU Observer, the Commissioner noted that increasing attacks and intolerance towards LGBTI people were the warning signs of a wider backlash against human rights and democracy. Despite progress over the past decades, there was now a widening gap between legal protection on paper and the lived realities of LGBTI people in Europe. Across borders, hardship and fear were being exploited, marginalised groups scapegoated and international law repudiated, with LGBTI people often among the first targets. Governments were reminded that universal human rights principles constituted a binding legal obligation under international treaties, not an optional policy preference. Closing the gap required political will, including funding for implementation and enforcement of digital regulations to combat disinformation and online hate speech and protecting people facing intersecting forms of discrimination. Governments were urged to safeguard human rights defenders, civil society organisations and independent democratic institutions. Pride was described as both a celebration of human diversity and a necessary annual exercise in resilience, determination and solidarity, born from protest. The Commissioner identified international human rights law as the roadmap for human dignity, and the Yogyakarta Principles as a guidebook for applying it to sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.

On 5 August, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the WorldPride Human Rights Conference in Amsterdam. Marking both the 25th anniversary of equal marriage in the Netherlands, and the 20th anniversary of the Yogyakarta Principles, he highlighted the considerable progress achieved for the human rights of LGBTI people, as well as the continuing prejudice, gaps and regression in human rights protection across Europe. He framed attacks on LGBTI equality as part of a wider assault on the human rights framework established by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while stressing the continued importance of using international human rights law to hold states to their obligations. He commended young queer activists for their leadership and willingness to build new alliances to protect fundamental rights, emphasising the importance of honouring and celebrating those differences that unite us as humanity.

During the Human Rights Conference, the Commissioner [took part](#) in a panel discussion on “Diplomacy in Action: Advancing Equal Rights in Times of Pushback”. He also [met](#) with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Rob Jetten; Human Rights Ambassador of the Netherlands, Wim Geerts; UN Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IE SOGI), Graeme Reid; and with representatives of the INGO Bi+ Equal, among others.

Regarding *freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists*, on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, the Commissioner [stressed](#) that press freedom is weakening across Europe and facing a structural crisis. He noted that beyond the physical dangers faced by journalists on the frontlines in Ukraine, a convergence of threats is putting the bedrock of our democracies under strain. The landscape for journalists and media is becoming increasingly challenging as they face legal and political pressure, threats to physical and digital safety and structural erosion due to media ownership concentration, economic pressure, political interference in public broadcasting and the dominance of internet platforms. The Commissioner called on states to investigate all attacks on journalists and end impunity; protect critical reporting and public service media from undue political and economic pressure; ensure journalists can work freely and safely and implement the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and Council of Europe standards, particularly on journalists’ safety and on abusive lawsuits (SLAPPs).

The Commissioner’s work on *women’s rights and gender equality* included an [address](#), on 9 June, at the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission annual conference on ‘Women forging lasting peace. Dismantling barriers to gender-inclusive conflict resolution and peacebuilding’ in Strasbourg. Speaking on ‘Reclaiming women’s roles in

peace and security', the Commissioner reflected on the evolving recognition of women's essential role in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and the consolidation of peace. He highlighted how women-led civil society organisations and women leaders had made significant contributions to peace processes and had helped secure stronger human rights protections, including attention to sexual violence. The Commissioner reviewed key international and European developments that had strengthened the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including the prosecution of sexual crimes by international tribunals, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)10 and the Istanbul Convention. He noted that research had demonstrated that women's participation increased the likelihood of lasting peace agreements and contributed to more sustainable peace outcomes. The Commissioner identified four priorities for advancing gender-inclusive peacebuilding: addressing patriarchy, misogyny and discrimination; combating gender-based violence and promoting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; integrating women, peace and security considerations into peacetime and conflict prevention; and strengthening partnerships between states, multilateral organisations and civil society.

As regards *children's rights and rights of young people*, on 22 June, the Commissioner addressed a video message to the Conference on "Digital environment and Children's Rights: between new opportunities and risks", organised by the Human Rights Ombudsman of Slovenia. The Commissioner spoke about the need to protect children while cautioning against rushed or blanket bans on children's access to the internet. He highlighted the need for a human-rights-based and consultative approach, taking into account freedom of expression and children's right to receive information. The Commissioner also noted that online platforms and industries should bear the primary responsibility for preventing and addressing harm, including through strong enforcement of the EU Digital Services Act and relevant national legislation. Finally, he referred to the importance of meaningfully involving children themselves in consultations for the development of appropriate solutions.

On 22 June, the Commissioner met Emma Wedner, newly elected Chair, and Xesc Mainzer, Vice Chair of the Advisory Council for Youth in Strasbourg. They exchanged on youth concerns and the Commissioner's priorities.

In the field of *transitional justice*, the Commissioner's activities included his [social media post](#) on 10 July, on the occasion of the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, remembering the victims of the genocide and standing with their families in honouring their memory. He condemned the denial of genocide and the glorification of war criminals. He called on all to face the past in order to learn from it and safeguard a future free from violence.

On 30 August, International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the Commissioner [joined](#) the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and other mechanisms in calling on states and all stakeholders to reaffirm the primacy of law over force, the centrality of victims over oblivion, and the irreplaceable value of multilateralism and the international rule of law.

4. ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNCIL OF EUROPE INSTITUTIONS

4.1 System of the European Convention on Human Rights

In the reference period, the Commissioner reiterated the need to protect the European Convention on Human Rights in Council of Europe member states, underlining the universality of human rights and the independence of the Court in the context of migration-related challenges. Thus, on 20 July, the Commissioner addressed these issues in the op-ed 'Europe is at risk of creating a human rights black hole with its 'return hubs' for migrants' published in The Guardian (see *Embedding human rights in the great issues of the day: Migration*).

On 25 May, the Commissioner published an op-ed in Le Monde entitled '[After Chisinau: Europe, wake up!](#)'. He highlighted concerns surrounding the political debate following the adoption of the Chişinău Political Declaration

and its potential implications for the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. The Commissioner noted the need to avoid framing national security and individual rights as opposing interests and warned against political pressure aimed at lowering human rights standards, particularly in migration and asylum cases. He focussed on three key priorities: ensuring that migrants and asylum seekers are not treated as having lesser rights; upholding the absolute prohibition of non-refoulement through changes to laws and practices, including safeguards around externalised asylum and return procedures; and protecting judicial independence from political interference. The Commissioner also challenged the argument that weakening human rights protections was necessary to counter populism, emphasising instead that stronger protection of human rights for all was essential to rebuilding public trust, maintaining security and preventing the erosion of fundamental rights.

On 7 July, he submitted his [written comments](#) to the European Court of Human Rights on the case of *Nikoleta Zerelega and Others v. Greece*. The case, lodged by five Greek citizens of Roma origin, concerns alleged violations of their rights to a fair trial, respect for private and family life, and the prohibition of discrimination. These allegations followed an administrative protocol aimed at evicting them from the informal settlement where they had been residing for around 25 years, leaving them at risk of homelessness. In his third-party intervention, the Commissioner submitted that the inadequate housing conditions prevailing in Greece's informal Roma settlements result from a lack of sufficient efforts by the relevant authorities to provide a solution. This situation is compounded by antigypsyism embedded in society, which hinders Roma communities from fully and equally enjoying their human rights. The Commissioner noted that the risk of eviction faced by Roma communities in informal settlements, which constitute a “home” under the European Convention on Human Rights, without providing alternative accommodation, disproportionately interferes with the right to respect for one's home, especially given the vulnerability of the communities involved. He considered that an eviction, or the risk of eviction, can jeopardise the enjoyment of interrelated rights.

4.2 Committee of Ministers

On 14 May, the Commissioner participated in the 135th session of the Committee of Ministers in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova. In his [address](#), the Commissioner condemned the atrocities perpetrated Russian Federation against the people of Ukraine, calling for accountability and stressing the need to uphold human rights and dignity, including for those who have fled the conflict. He warned that the system of the European Convention on Human Rights was fragile and required stronger support from member states. The Commissioner called for a firm commitment to the universality of human rights and independence of courts and rejected the instrumentalisation of human rights in the pursuit of policy goals in the context of migration management.

4.3 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Meeting with PACE President

On 29 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Petra Bayr, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. They discussed ways of strengthening cooperation between the institutions in the face of human rights challenges, including the environment.

4.4 Others

On 25 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Special Envoy of the Council of Europe Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine, in the margins of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdańsk. They discussed the protection of children of Ukraine and putting their dignity at the centre of recovery.

On 26 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Carlo Monticelli, Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) in the margins of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdansk. They discussed putting people at the centre of

all recovery efforts in Ukraine and the important role played by the CEB in this regard, as well as strengthening bilateral co-operation.

On 6 July, the Commissioner had an exchange with the European Union Heads of Mission in Strasbourg. They exchanged on the main current challenges to human rights and democracy.

On 7 July, the Commissioner had a lunch meeting with the permanent representatives at the Council of Europe of Nordic and Baltic states. They exchanged on the main current challenges to human rights and democracy.

5. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

5.1 National Human Rights Institutions

During the reporting period, the Commissioner engaged with national human rights institutions during his country visits and missions as well as in Strasbourg to discuss topical national human rights developments.

On 7 July, the Commissioner [met](#) with Anahit Manasyan, Human Rights Defender of Armenia, in Strasbourg. They exchanged on the importance of a strong and independent national human rights institution in protecting the rights, dignity and well-being of all.

On 8 July, the Commissioner delivered a video message to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission annual conference exploring the characteristics of a human rights and equality leader.

5.2 Cooperation with European and international organisations

Meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

On 4 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Andrea Bolaños Vargas, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, in Strasbourg. They discussed the deteriorating environment for Europe's human rights defenders, including funding shortages, crackdown and harassment, and restrictive laws.

Meeting with the UN Special Envoy for Road Safety

On 15 June, the Commissioner [met](#) Jean Todt, UN Special Envoy for Road Safety in Strasbourg. They discussed the multiple human rights issues around road safety and the strengthening of awareness and action to prevent avoidable deaths and injuries.

Meeting with NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security

On 17 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Irene Fellin, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, in Brussels. They exchange views on advancing human rights in peace and security efforts.

Meeting with EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration

On 18 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Magnus Brunner, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, in Brussels. The discussion focused on the ongoing need to protect displaced Ukrainians and the importance of robust human rights systems in the context of the implementation of Migration Pact and Return Regulation.

Mission to Geneva

On 23 June, the Commissioner conducted a [mission](#) to Geneva. He discussed a broad range of issues with partners from the United Nations and other international organisations, including externalisation of migration, the rights of older persons, freedom of assembly and association and wider regional and global topics. The Commissioner met with Awa Dabo, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights; Gina Romero, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; Zvezdan Pirošek, UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons; Peggy Hicks, Director of Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division at the OHCHR; and Salma Sassi, Commissioner of The African Charter established the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

The Commissioner also [exchanged](#) with Gehad Madi, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and spoke at the high-level launch of the UN Special Rapporteur report on “Externalization of migration governance: new trends and specific aspects”.

Meeting with the EU Special Envoy for the Ukrainians in the European Union

On 26 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Ylva Johansson, EU Special Envoy for the Ukrainians in the European Union, in the margins of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdansk. They discussed the situation of people displaced by the war from Ukraine to other European countries.

Meeting with the Director of the European Union Gender Equality Agency

On 26 June, the Commissioner [met](#) with Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Union's Gender Equality Agency (EIGE), in the margins of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdansk. They discussed the situation of people displaced by the war from Ukraine to other European countries.

Meeting with the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Outside the European Union

On 8 July, the Commissioner [met](#) with Mairéad McGuinness, EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Outside the European Union, in Strasbourg. They discussed issues of common concern around pluralism, human rights and democratic values.

Meeting with the UNHCR Representative for France, Monaco and the Council of Europe

On 9 July, the Commissioner [met](#) with Sophie Magennis, UNHCR Representative for France, Monaco and the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg. They discussed human rights risks of 'return hubs', the need for continued protection of displaced Ukrainians and other pressing issues.

Meeting with UN Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

On 5 August, the Commissioner [met](#) with Graeme Reid, UN Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IE SOGI), in the margins of the WorldPride Human Rights Conference in Amsterdam.

5.3 Other meetings

55th Summer Session of the René Cassin Foundation International Institute of Human Rights

On 10 July, the Commissioner delivered [closing remarks](#) at the 55th Summer Session of the René Cassin Foundation International Institute of Human Rights, in Strasbourg. He welcomed the presence of 155 participants from 44 countries gathered to study and keep the spirit of resistance alive, as a powerful message of hope.

European Forum Alpbach 2026

On 28 August, the Commissioner attended the 2026 edition of the European Forum Alpbach in Austria. He delivered opening remarks at the Ukraine Recovery Lab working session titled 'Vision building – preferred future for Ukrainian recovery' (see *Impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on human rights*). He also had an [exchange](#) with EFA scholarship holders and alumni network on what it would take to deliver human rights for all in the face of the current challenges to human rights in Europe.

6. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION WORK

Media monitoring during this period recorded a total of 443 news mentions and 1,181 clips related to the Commissioner's work. The issues that received the most coverage were: migration (including return policies and return hubs), Ukrainians displaced across Europe, the human rights of older persons in long term care facilities in Romania, the human rights of LGBTI people, freedom of assembly in Serbia, the human rights of Roma and Travellers and social media bans. Additionally, the media covered the memorandum on Georgia and the memorandum on Türkiye.

The work of the Commissioner was covered by several major national and international media outlets across Europe and beyond, including: AFP, Agence Belga, Agence Europe, Agencia Lusa, AgenSIR, AgerPress, AGI, APA, Aktuality.sk, Al Jazeera, ANSA, ArmenPress, Arminfo, Asahi Shimbun, Berliner Zeitung, Bianet, BTA, Civil Georgia, Daily Mail, Danas, Der Spiegel, Die Welt, DPA, DW, EFE, El Pais, Eunews.it, EUObserver, Euronews, FENA, Fonet, France 24, France Info, Georgia Today, InfoMigrants, Interfax-Ukraine, La Libre Belgique, La Tribune de Genève, La Vanguardia, Le Monde, Le Soir, Libération, L'Obs, Mediapart, N1 Info, Nouvel Obs, Ouest France, Politico, Polskie Radio, Radio Moldova, Radio Slobodna Evropa, RBC Ukraine, RFE RL, Reuters, RFI, Romea.cz, RTBF, RTE.ie, RTV Slovenija, Sarajevo Times, Sky News, Slobodna Bosna, STA, Stern.de, SwissInfo, TAZ, The Associated Press, The Brussels Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Irish Independent, The Irish Times, The Kyiv Independent, The Malta Independent, The Romania Journal, The Washington Post, To Vima, Turan, Turkish Minute, Ukrinform, Yahoo News, Zerkalo Nedeli, Zmina.info, Proto Thema, TVP World, Salzburger Nachrichten, Telegraph, Romania Insider, Radio Romania, Ritzau, Politiken, Turkish Minute, Radio Svoboda, The European Times, De Volkskrant, Koha Jone, Jylland Posten, European Pravda, The Washington Post, Faz.net, Reuters Online, RTÉ, Monaco Info, Armenian Report, Deutsche Tageszeitung, EIN News, The Spectator, Publico, UkrInform, Serbia News Media.

The Commissioner gave interviews to: Asahi Shimbun, EU Observer, CorD magazine, Politico, Kyiv Independent, RBC Ukraine, RFE RL, RTÉ, as well as to the Just Access podcast.

He placed 3 OpEds: in [Le Monde](#) entitled [After Chisinau: Europe, wake up!](#) on 25 May; in [The Guardian](#) entitled [Europe is at risk of creating a human rights black hole with its 'return hubs' for migrants](#) on 20 July, and in [EU Observer](#) entitled [Attacks on LGBTI people are the warning sign of a wider backlash against democracy](#) on 3 August.

A total of 26 news items were published on the website over the course of four months. The site recorded 262,326 unique visitors and 425,013 page views.

A total of 108 posts were published across six social media channels: [BlueSky](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Mastodon](#), and [X](#). On X alone, these posts reached 230,356 impressions and attracted 832 new followers, maintaining a 2.9% engagement rate. The Commissioner's LinkedIn presence continued to expand, reaching 9,017 followers and securing more than 198,467 impressions and 3,378 reactions for an 11.6% engagement rate. On Instagram, he now has 385 followers (+200 during the period) and earned more than 85,000 organic views over the period.