

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ

2ND QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT 2020

1 April to 30 June

Presented to the Committee of Ministers
and the Parliamentary Assembly

This report contains a summary of the activities carried out by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, between 1 April and 30 June 2020.

1. Reports and continuous dialogue

Letter to the Prime Minister of Malta regarding Malta's obligations towards migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, crossing the Mediterranean

On 11 May, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) that she addressed to the Prime Minister of Malta, Robert Abela, in which she urged Malta to meet its obligations to save lives at sea, ensure prompt and safe disembarkation, and investigate allegations of delays or non-response to situations of distress. Noting that Libya cannot be considered a place of safety, she called on Malta's government to refrain from any action, including any instructions issued to private vessels, that would result in the return to and disembarkation in Libya of persons rescued or intercepted at sea, and to ensure full accountability for situations in which action by Maltese authorities has led to such returns. While stressing the need for more solidarity and co-operation from other member states with coastal states, including through responsibility sharing for adequate search and rescue capacity and ensuring timely disembarkation, the Commissioner called on Malta to ensure that the human rights of those rescued are not endangered by disagreements between member states about disembarkation and that humanitarian considerations always prevail. In addition, referring to her [Recommendation 'Lives saved. Rights protected. Bridging the protection gap for refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean'](#), she stressed the need for all member states to seek constructive co-operation with civil society, in particular NGOs engaged in search and rescue activities and in the monitoring and defence of the human rights of migrants at sea.

The letter is available on the Commissioner's website, along with the reply of the Prime Minister.

Letter to the Chair and members of the Swiss National Council Committee on Security Policy

On 13 May, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) to the Chair, Ida Glanzmann-Hunkeler, and members of the Swiss National Council Committee on Security Policy, inviting parliamentarians to review the draft Federal Law on Police Counterterrorism Measures to ensure that all human rights standards are respected. The Commissioner raised the lack of sufficient legal safeguards as to the scope of the administrative measures which may be imposed by the Federal Police Office, outside the context of criminal proceedings, against a person whom it considers to be a "potential terrorist" based on a presumption that they might commit certain acts in the future. She underlined the risks of excessive and arbitrary interferences with human rights resulting from the lack of a precise definition. She also underlined the seriousness of the administrative measures envisaged, in particular placing a person under house arrest, which are difficult to reconcile with the requirement that any interference with fundamental freedoms must be proportionate and necessary. The Commissioner noted the risk of serious interferences with freedom of movement, the right to respect for private and family life, as well as freedom of assembly and data protection that could result from the imposition of other administrative measures envisaged in the draft law and that might be imposed at the discretion of the police. Finally, the plan to apply these police measures, outside the juvenile justice system and without appropriate legal safeguards, to children as young as 12 years, and in the case of house arrest, to children aged 15 years and over, was of particular concern.

The letter is available on the Commissioner's website along with the reply of the Chair of the Security Policy Committee of the National Council of Switzerland.

Report on the Republic of Moldova

On 25 June, the Commissioner published a report on her visit to the Republic of Moldova, focusing on violence against women and domestic violence, children's rights, the human rights of persons with disabilities and Roma, hate speech and the rights to housing and health.

While welcoming efforts to bring the legislation on domestic violence and its implementation in line with the relevant international standards, the Commissioner called on the Moldovan authorities to ratify the Istanbul Convention without delay. The government should also ensure that the public has accurate information about the true nature and scope of violence against women and domestic violence and the measures envisaged in the Istanbul Convention to respond to and prevent these phenomena. Furthermore, efforts are needed to expand the network of shelters and support services for victims of domestic violence and improve their access to justice, as well as the capacities of the police, prosecutors and the judiciary to effectively investigate complaints and deal with such cases in a gender-sensitive manner.

The Commissioner welcomed the progress achieved with regard to the de-institutionalisation of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, but community-based services to support their independent living should be extended and the accessibility of public spaces improved. The Commissioner calls for a more ambitious reform of mental health services, with the aim of progressively eliminating recourse to coercive practices in psychiatry, and to ensure that the implementation of the legal changes introducing assisted decision-making are accompanied by awareness raising measures for all those involved and monitored in close consultation with persons with disabilities and their associations.

While children have also benefited from progress in de-institutionalisation and inclusive education, the Commissioner encouraged the authorities to move further away from practices of institutionalising children, including on the basis of poverty or disability; to expand alternative care models in family-type settings; and allocate more resources and support to guardians and foster care providers. A culture of respect for the rights of the child should be promoted. This requires improving access to social protection entitlements to guarantee the right of all children to an adequate standard of living; a further strengthening of the national framework for eliminating violence against children, including by encouraging a shift in attitudes in relation to corporal punishment; and the promotion of child-friendly justice aiming at rehabilitation and integration. The authorities should also provide accurate information about the need for immunisation and ensure that safe and high-quality vaccines are available.

The Commissioner welcomed the expansion of the network of Roma community mediators and called on the authorities to strengthen their role and capacities and ensure adequate funding of Roma inclusion policies.

The Commissioner was concerned about instances of hate speech, especially by political leaders during the electoral campaigns, targeting women and LGBTI persons. She emphasised the responsibility of public officials and community leaders to refrain from hate speech, disavow it when it occurs, and combat it through prevention, prosecution, self-regulation and counter-speech. To

this end, the existing legal and institutional framework should be fine-tuned and explicitly provide protection against hate speech, including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. The Council for Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality should also be strengthened through the necessary changes in regulations and allocation of resources. The Commissioner underscored that the authorities must take ownership and responsibility in fighting hate speech and translate their commitment into a visible strategy.

Finally, the Commissioner encouraged the Moldovan authorities to promote affordable and adequate housing and quality healthcare for all. She recommended undertaking a comprehensive needs assessment to serve as a basis for targeted housing interventions to address the shortage of social and affordable housing, including for impoverished Roma and persons with disabilities, and the limited access to water and sanitation. She also urged the authorities to gradually increase public health spending to make healthcare more affordable and accessible, including in rural areas and for disadvantaged groups, and to ensure adequate remuneration and protection of health care personnel. To overcome important barriers in accessing health services, the authorities should tackle the phenomenon of out-of-pocket and informal payments.

The Commissioner's observations following her discussions in Tiraspol on violence against women and domestic violence; the human rights of persons with disabilities; children's rights, inclusive education and the situation of the Latin-script schools; ensuring an enabling environment for civil society organisations; and social rights are contained in the Annex to the report.

The [report](#) is available on the Commissioner's website together with the comments of the Moldovan authorities.

2. Themes

Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom

On 30 April, ahead of World Press Freedom Day, the Commissioner recalled in a [statement](#) that free and quality journalism is an asset of democracy. She paid a tribute to all journalists and media professionals who work in defence of truth and justice. Whether prominent investigative reporters covering global crises or precarious freelancers working for a local paper, they expose injustices, crime, corruption or misuse of power and keep government action under the public spotlight. As stressed by the Commissioner, journalists provide us with one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal to take decisions relevant to our lives, in normal times, and even more so in times of crisis: reliable information.

On 28 May, the Commissioner participated in an [online event organised by the Global Network Initiative](#) with a view to exploring a human rights-based approach to content regulation in the context of the EU Digital Services Act (DSA). The Commissioner highlighted the disparate impacts of digital transformation: technology has been valuable for healthcare, education, and employment, but abuses can also contribute to extensive personal data collection or threaten diverse and pluralistic political information environments. Furthermore, the pandemic response has accelerated digital rights infringements in the name of public health. The Commissioner referred to her Recommendation on artificial intelligence (AI) and human rights as a practical tool to mitigate the negative impact that AI systems may have on people's lives and rights.

Freedom of Assembly

On 23 June, the Commissioner made a [statement](#) in connection with the arrest of more than one hundred persons who had been demonstrating in Moscow and Saint Petersburg the previous day. Calling the dispersal of those public gatherings an illustration of the intolerance of the Russian authorities towards the peaceful expression of opinions, the Commissioner reiterated her stance that the sanitary restrictions introduced to fight the COVID-19 pandemic should not be used to unduly limit human rights and freedoms. She further urged the authorities of the Russian Federation to bring legislation and practice governing freedom of assembly and expression in line with European human rights standards and expressed her intention to follow up on those issues, including during the visit to the Russian Federation planned later in 2020.

Human rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers

During this reporting period, the Commissioner reacted to several country-specific developments related to the rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

A letter sent by the Commissioner to the Prime Minister of Malta on the situation of migrants at sea is discussed in the section on reports and continuous dialogue above. This letter was followed up by a [statement](#) published by the Commissioner on 4 June, in which she expressed concern about the situation of more than 400 persons kept at that time on private ships outside Malta's territorial waters. She noted that since Malta closed its ports in response to the COVID-19 crisis, persons rescued at sea were no longer disembarked on land, but transferred to ships rented by the government and intended to be held there until such time as other states committed to relocating them. The Commissioner stressed the crucial need for the creation of structural solutions at the European level to support coastal member states which are at the forefront of migration movements and called on member states to promptly decide on such solutions, in a spirit of solidarity. She warned against waiting for the deterioration of the health of those rescued, triggering an obligation for Malta, which had full control over the rented ships, to quickly evacuate them, or making safe disembarkation on land dependent on relocation commitments by other member states. The Commissioner urged Malta to immediately grant monitoring bodies and agencies providing assistance and protection access to those rescued and to take action to rapidly end the situation created and to avoid its repetition. She also expressed concern that the confinement of those rescued on the ships, indefinitely and without remedies, was not compliant with the right to liberty, and urged Malta to ensure that the decision to position the ships outside territorial waters would not result in depriving those on board of the opportunity to request international protection. Lastly, the Commissioner reiterated that no action by Council of Europe member states should result, either directly or indirectly, in the return of migrants at sea to places where they face serious human rights violations and stressed again her position that any co-operation with the Libyan authorities that would result in such returns should be suspended.

On social media, the Commissioner also reacted to several developments in Greece, in particular to express satisfaction at the [start of relocations](#) of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children to other member states, as well as the willingness of [several European cities](#) to host them, and to encourage Council of Europe member states to commit to relocations. She also [called](#) on the Greek Parliament to follow the recommendations for concerns raised by UNHCR, the Greek Ombudsman and the National Commission for Human Rights on the reform of asylum legislation, especially the expanded use of detention, and [urged](#) the authorities to assist the thousands of refugees who exited

from the Greek reception system, leaving them at risk of homelessness, and to design and implement a comprehensive long-term integration policy.

As regards the United Kingdom, on 29 June, the Commissioner [commented](#) on the debate in the House of Commons on the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill. She noted that the proposal to retain the possibility of family reunification and relocation of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children to the UK after the Brexit transition period provided an important lifeline, and would be of immense importance to the children involved, as well as a welcome sign of continuing solidarity and co-operation with other European countries. She also noted that the proposal to introduce a 28-day time limit for immigration detention would contribute to bringing UK practice in line with international frameworks.

On 19 June, ahead of World Refugee Day, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) calling for an end to pushbacks and border violence. She expressed her concern that pushbacks were becoming more normalised and carried out in an increasingly violent way across Europe. She warned that if member states remained silent about or even condoned such actions by their peers, this would undermine common European values and principles. She also highlighted that the protection of all citizens could be compromised when violence by police or other law enforcement agencies can take place with impunity. She called on states to ensure that National Human Rights Institutions have sufficient capacity to monitor borders, and urged them to carry out effective investigations into all allegations of violent or racist incidents.

On 22 June, the Commissioner gave a [video speech](#) entitled 'Protecting refugees in Europe: the ECHR and beyond' at the 20th Berlin Conference on Refugee Rights. The speech highlighted the shift, in the area of asylum and migration policy, from ensuring compliance with the Convention towards finding new ways to prevent such obligations becoming applicable in the first place. At the same time, she noted that, when the Court does not find a violation in specific situations, member states are more than willing to extrapolate from the Court's conclusions a broad justification for their practices to keep those in need of international protection out. The Commissioner also highlighted the political context in which violations of the Convention occur. She noted the need for collective political action to ensure the Convention's protections remain at the forefront of asylum and migration policy.

Other activities in this thematic area included a statement on search and rescue in relation to the COVID-19 crisis (see below), participation in a hearing by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (see 'System of the European Convention on Human Rights'), and exchanges with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (see 'other meetings').

Women's rights and gender equality

On 14 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) regarding two citizens' bills pending in the lower house of Poland's parliament, the Sejm. The first bill removes the legal ground for terminating pregnancy in the case of severe impairment of the foetus, including in cases where such impairment is fatal. The second bill, accompanied by a narrative stigmatising LGBTI people, amends Poland's criminal law in a manner that may have a negative impact on the provision of sexual education in schools. Considering that the bills, if adopted, would seriously affect the rights and safety of women as well as the right of children to comprehensive, age-appropriate and evidence-based sexuality education, the Commissioner called on the Polish authorities to reject them and to remain vigilant

against any other initiatives that seek to limit human rights or stigmatise certain groups of people. She repeated her call on Poland to urgently ensure effective access to safe and legal abortion care and to make it legal on a woman's request in early pregnancy, and thereafter throughout pregnancy to protect women's health and lives and ensure freedom from ill-treatment.

On 19 May, the Commissioner participated in the "COVID-19: Parliamentary webinar on sexual and reproductive health and rights", organised by PACE's Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. Referring to her 7 May statement on this topic (see below), she reiterated that states should ensure full access to sexual and reproductive health services for all women without discrimination, and with specific attention for women at risk or victims of gender-based violence and other vulnerable groups of women, and consider access to abortion care, contraception and maternal healthcare as essential health care services to be maintained during the crisis. She also called for vigilance in the face of attempts to roll back women's sexual and reproductive rights and support for women's rights defenders who play an essential role in assisting women during the pandemic.

Human rights of LGBTI people

On 2 April, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) on omnibus Bill T/9934 submitted by the Hungarian government to Parliament. She expressed concern that the proposed amendments to the Registry Act would affect the human rights of trans people by outlawing their legal gender recognition. The Commissioner called on the Hungarian Parliament not to adopt the amendments and pointed out that blocking access to legal gender recognition was in contravention with human rights standards and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. On 19 May, [she expressed regret at the adoption of the Bill](#) by the Hungarian Parliament.

On 29 April, the Commissioner gave a keynote address at a meeting of the European Network of Governmental LGBTI Focal Points, which was organised for the first time online in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commissioner gave an overview of her work to date to protect and promote the human rights of LGBTI people, noting that her priorities reflected the need to respond to a mounting negative backlash in Europe. Discussing future work, she expressed her commitment to continue to support LGBTI defenders and to press for positive developments, notably in the fields of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, legal gender recognition based on self-determination for transgender people, prohibiting medically unnecessary sex-normalising surgeries on intersex children without informed consent, and ending the practice of conversion therapies. She encouraged the governmental focal points to be in touch with her office as appropriate and to continue to promote the human rights of LGBTI people at the national level.

On 14 May, the Commissioner co-signed a [statement](#) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTI people, together with the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, the Inter-American Commission, and a large number of independent human rights experts. COVID-19 and the measures taken to address it, the statement observed, had exacerbated inequalities and discrimination. The statement detailed some of the negative impacts of the pandemic for LGBTI people, including delayed access to healthcare such as HIV or hormone therapy treatments, increased exposure to domestic violence, economic and social hardship and isolation. Highlighting the ongoing work of LGBTI civil society to fill the gaps, the statement called on states to better take into account the experience and needs of LGBTI people in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 15 May, ahead of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, the Commissioner called on Council of Europe member states to take firm action against [hate speech targeting LGBTI people](#), which is dangerously spreading across Europe. The Commissioner noted that in the past year alone, she had documented or reacted to hate speech and threats against LGBTI people, including by politicians and media, in several member states. She stressed that such hate speech, when met with impunity, sends the signal that intolerance is accepted and this has real consequences on the daily lives of LGBTI people, with hate crimes and harassment on the rise. The Commissioner called on political leaders to condemn incitement to hatred and to ensure that all the necessary tools to effectively investigate and prosecute hate speech and hate crimes against LGBTI people are in place. She recalled that member states bear the responsibility to address societal prejudices against LGBTI people and to ensure that they can fully participate in our societies as equal citizens.

On 17 May, the Commissioner supported the Tbilisi Pride, which was organised online in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Technical difficulties eventually prevented the live participation of the Commissioner, but she sent a written message. After paying tribute to the courage and perseverance of LGBTI activists, the Commissioner observed that LGBTI people have faced obstacles to enjoying freedom of assembly in Georgia, with a history of violence and political controversy around attempts to organise pride marches. She noted a large gap between the legal framework for the protection of LGBTI people and its implementation in practice. Finally, she welcomed the participation in this year's online pride of political figures, including an MP and a government official, as well as of the Public Defender, as a strong signal of support.

On 25 June, the Commissioner participated in the [annual ILGA-Europe gala](#), held online. In a conversation with ILGA-Europe's Executive Director Evelyne Paradis, the Commissioner discussed the impact of the pandemic on human rights in general and on LGBTI people specifically, as well as priorities for recovery. The need for more support, including financial, for LGBTI civil society organisations was also mentioned. The recording of the discussion is available on the Commissioner's website.

On 30 June, the Commissioner spoke at the opening of a webinar on the human rights of intersex persons, organised by the Finnish Permanent Representation and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit of the Council of Europe. Noting the ground-breaking issue paper published by her office on this issue in 2015, the Commissioner regretted that progress in this field has been too slow. The Commissioner called on member states to collect data on the situation of intersex people, to prohibit medically unnecessary sex-normalising surgeries without informed consent, and to raise awareness about intersex people in order to foster full acceptance and recognition.

Transitional Justice

On 22 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) in which she welcomed the first joint commemoration in Jasenovac since 2014 gathering the authorities, including the Croatian President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker, and the national minorities and victims' associations. On that day 75 years ago, the [Jasenovac extermination camp](#) in Croatia was dismantled. In that camp, more than 83 000 persons were brutally killed by the fascist Ustasha regime. The Commissioner expressed hope that this encouraging development would be followed by a constructive dialogue and resolute steps aiming to address the outstanding issues that prompted the national minorities to have their separate commemorations in the past years.

On 15 May, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) concerning the announced mass in Sarajevo on 16 May with the intention of commemorating soldiers and civilians who died in Bleiburg, in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Commissioner expressed her concern that this mass risked becoming a glorification of those who supported the Nazi-allied fascist Ustasha regime, complicit in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings. She evoked that such a commemoration would represent an additional attack on the victims of that regime, fly in the face of the ideals and principles of antifascism on which European countries have been built after WWII, and deal a severe blow to the efforts towards reconciliation in the region. Lastly, she stressed that political and religious leaders in the region should work together to rebuild trust between peoples and refrain from taking steps that reinforce divisions and intolerance.

On 25 May, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) regarding the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the massacre of Tuzla, where a grenade fired by the Army of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina killed 71 people and injured more than 130. The Commissioner stressed that while it was important to commemorate the victims and survivors of that atrocious crime and remember the suffering of their families, there was a need to deliver justice to these victims.

The Commissioner expressed her concern regarding widespread denial of wartime crimes, falsification of the facts established by the ICTY and the glorification of war criminals in the region which have become serious obstacles to the fight against impunity. She emphasised that many war criminals in the region hide behind the refusal of some countries to extradite their nationals who are charged with war crimes, or to co-operate in other ways. The most egregious such case is that of Novak Djukić, who was convicted by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for ordering the Tuzla attack, and five years after his condemnation is still free in Serbia because the sentence against him has not yet been enforced. The Commissioner emphasised that it is time that countries in the region depoliticise wartime crimes and pay more attention to the needs of the survivors and of the victims' families. Ensuring justice for past crimes must be one of the top political priorities in the region.

On 30 May, on the eve of the White Ribbons Day in honour of thousands of civilians, including 102 children, killed in the town of Prijedor in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, the Commissioner published a [tweet](#) in which she saluted the work of human right defenders on preserving the memory of the victims and called on the local authorities in Prijedor to step up the preparations for the memorial for the killed children.

Co-operation with national human rights structures

On 26 June, the Commissioner published a Human Rights Comment on [the role of Equality Bodies in building a fairer Europe](#). In the comment, the Commissioner first presented the legal basis and historical expansion of Equality Bodies across Europe, describing their mandate to promote equality and fight discrimination at the national level, and noting that various models of Equality Bodies exist. The Commissioner is mandated to co-operate with national human rights structures, including Equality Bodies. She strives to maintain a steady collaboration with them in the monitoring and promotion of human rights, given their strong national expertise.

The Commissioner's comment then provided a variety of examples of actions taken by Equality Bodies to address equality challenges in Europe. In particular, the Commissioner focused on rising intolerance and hate speech, poverty and economic inequalities, the COVID-19 pandemic and algorithmic discrimination. The Equality Bodies' activities mentioned included court cases, studies and reports, letters to the authorities, the handling of individual complaints and education

campaigns. With regards to such campaigns, the Commissioner stressed her view that outreach and communication activities by Equality Bodies are essential to promote a culture of equality.

The Commissioner observed that Equality Bodies still face several challenges that prevent them from achieving their full potential, such as: weak legal basis, incomplete mandates or functions, insufficient resources and lack of political support. In some cases, when working on sensitive issues, Equality Bodies have experienced attacks and threats by politicians and others, or other types of interference that threaten their independence. She welcomed recent efforts to strengthen standards on the status and work of Equality Bodies, including by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Union Commission, and called on member states to ensure that their Equality Bodies conform to these standards. The Commissioner stated that she will continue to work to ensure that independent and effective Equality Bodies are in place across Europe, in order to create more equality.

Human Rights and Business

The Commissioner delivered opening remarks and gave an overview of the achievements of the Council of Europe and her office in the area of human rights and business at an online conference “Prosperity Through Diversity” hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Greece on 25 June. Pointing out the key role of the private sector in the field of Artificial Intelligence and in setting the boundaries of free speech in the digital sphere, she called for strengthened co-operation and dialogue on human rights between state actors, private companies, international organisations and civil society. Noting the growing trend towards the adoption of binding legislation regulating business conduct, she expressed support to the ongoing efforts to create a binding international instrument on this topic and encouraged the involvement of the Council of Europe in this process. The Commissioner further saluted the dedication of the private sector workers delivering medical responses and essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioner has released several general recommendations to Council of Europe member states concerning the need to ensure a human rights compliant response to this unprecedented emergency. They covered a range of issues detailed below.

On 2 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) urging member states not to leave **persons with disabilities** behind in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while recalling the relevant international human rights standards, in particular the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She stressed the need to pay special attention to the situation of persons with disabilities who may require special support in order to comply with containment measures taken in the context of the pandemic, while expressing concern about a growing risk of disruption to essential support services persons with disabilities rely on. She enumerated a number of measures states must take in order to prevent such disruptions. The Commissioner pointed to the particular threat posed by large residential settings to the health of their residents, highlighting the need to take urgent measures to mitigate these risks. She further urged member states to reassure persons with disabilities that they will not be discriminated against in accessing life-saving interventions, to ensure that information about the pandemic is made available in a variety of accessible formats,

and that persons with disabilities are involved when designing measures affecting them during the entire course of the pandemic.

On 3 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) stressing that **press freedom** must not be undermined by measures to counter disinformation about COVID-19. She emphasised that the legitimate need to combat disinformation about the pandemic sometimes led national authorities to adopt measures that risked unduly and disproportionately restricting press freedom. Access to information is also a collateral victim of the measures that governments are taking to face the pandemic. Despite the fact that timely and accurate information is essential for the public to understand the danger and adopt measures at a personal level to protect themselves, the filtering of information and delays in responses to freedom of information requests have been observed in several member states. There have been reports of cases of journalists who were prevented from attending press conferences, obtaining information from health authorities or documenting the operations of law enforcement officials. The Commissioner also underlined that it is of the utmost importance that journalists are able to work under safe conditions, without fear of being harassed or attacked. However, there have been attempts, including by high-level officials, to target journalists reporting on COVID-19. Journalists have been arrested and detained in reprisal for their coverage. In the Commissioner's view, there is no doubt that governments are facing unprecedented challenges during this pandemic. This cannot however be an excuse to clamp down on the press and thus restrict the public's right to receive information. She therefore urged all Council of Europe member states to preserve press and media freedom and ensure that measures to combat disinformation are necessary, proportionate and subject to regular oversight, including by Parliament and national human rights institutions. Measures to combat disinformation must never prevent journalists and media actors from carrying out their work or lead to content being unduly blocked on the Internet.

On the eve of World Health Day on 6 April, the Commissioner [expressed her gratitude to health care workers](#) across Europe who provided critical assistance to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. She stressed that their safety was crucial and that they must have access to effective protective equipment, regular coronavirus screening and antibody testing, and psychosocial support.

On 6 April, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) with regard to the rights and health of **prisoners and persons in remand centres** in the Council of Europe area. In particular, she noted that detention facilities do not allow the effective observance of protective measures among inmates, which renders them particularly vulnerable to contagion. The Commissioner also stressed that the long-standing problems of overcrowding, unsatisfactory health services and poor detention conditions that are prevalent in many European countries further exacerbated the risks to detainees. To prevent large-scale coronavirus outbreaks in places of detention, the Commissioner urged all member states to decrease the prison population by making use of alternatives to deprivation of liberty whenever possible. She also noted that particular consideration should be given to detainees with underlying health conditions, non-violent older persons and human rights activists and journalists detained in some member states, in violation of human rights standards. The Commissioner further highlighted the need to ensure that the human rights of those who remain in detention are respected while taking extraordinary measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, she stressed that any restrictions imposed on detainees should be necessary to protect the life and health of the persons concerned, proportionate to that aim, time-limited and mitigated by alternative arrangements. The Commissioner also underscored the paramount importance of preventing ill-treatment and torture by ensuring independent monitoring of detention facilities and

urged member states to adopt comprehensive crisis plans in co-operation with national human rights structures and civil society.

In a [statement](#) published on 7 April, ahead of International Roma Day, the Commissioner addressed the particularly negative impact of the pandemic on **Roma and Travellers**. For many impoverished and marginalised Roma, lack of water and sanitation and overcrowded housing make hygiene, social distancing and isolation measures difficult to implement. These difficulties are compounded by loss of sources of income and reduced access to social benefits as a result of quarantine measures and limited access to healthcare for persons living in informal settlements. Roma have also been the target of hate speech and scapegoated as a threat to public health, including by politicians, who have requested special measures targeting them. Travellers who have long suffered from a shortage of halting sites in several countries can also be faced with inextricable situations in times of quarantine and isolation. The Commissioner called on governments to implement crisis plans to ensure that Roma and Travellers benefit from the same level of information as others and from access to basic sanitation - first and foremost clean water. Governments should also support NGOs, activists, health mediators and community leaders and refrain from hate speech and discriminatory measures, which only exacerbate fears and divisions in society.

In April and May, the Commissioner published an article entitled [Coronavirus concerns are not carte blanche to snoop](#) in various European newspapers on the **impact on privacy of digital measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic**. Acknowledging that the potential of digital tools to contain the spread of infections is worth exploring, the Commissioner warned that they can also intrude on private lives and restrict the ability to participate in society. She stressed that a democracy does not have to sacrifice privacy to protect health and that governments must find the right balance, by ensuring that digital devices are designed and used in compliance with privacy and non-discrimination norms. The Commissioner recommended that these tools be anonymous, encrypted, decentralised, function on open source and available to the largest number of people possible. She also stressed that their use must be voluntary, based on informed consent, restricted to the purposes of health protection, contain a clear time limit, be fully transparent, and that users should be able to opt-out at any moment and be able to challenge intrusions into their private sphere. Finally, independent data protection authorities must test and approve technological devices before they are put into use and government operations must be subject to judicial review and monitoring by parliament and national human rights institutions.

On 16 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) calling on member states to continue **saving lives at sea and disembarking survivors in a safe port**, despite the unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19. She called for a prompt response to any call of distress at sea, the deployment of the necessary rescue capacity in a timely manner, and effective co-operation to identify a place of safety for the disembarkation of survivors, taking all necessary measures to protect the health of all involved. She expressed concerns over recent port closures and the discontinuation of rescue operations due to COVID-19. Mindful of the hardship faced by states such as Italy and Malta, the Commissioner also called on all Council of Europe member states, including flag states, to provide effective support and assistance in finding quick solutions.

On 23 April, the Commissioner published a [Human Rights Comment](#) in which she highlighted the lessons learnt from the pandemic for **health care systems**. She pointed out that universal and affordable health coverage created the basis for ensuring everybody's right to the protection of their health against the pandemic. A broader social rights approach is necessary to address entrenched health inequalities, for example through the eradication of homelessness. A focus on

gender also plays a central role in effective responses. The Commissioner encouraged member states to build resilient health care systems and urged them to ensure health professionals' health and safety at work.

On 7 May, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) stressing that full respect **of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights** is an essential component of Council of Europe member states' obligations to guarantee women's rights and advance gender equality, including in times of pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis and ensuing restrictions complicated access to essential sexual and reproductive health information, services and goods for women, such as abortion care, contraception and quality maternal health care. States should ensure full access to these services for all women without discrimination, and with specific attention for women at risk of or victims of gender-based violence and other vulnerable groups of women. States should consider access to abortion care, contraception, including emergency contraception, and maternal healthcare before, during and after childbirth, as essential health care services to be maintained during the crisis and take all necessary accompanying measures. There is also a need to remain vigilant in such times to prevent any legislative or policy backsliding in the field of women's sexual and reproductive rights. States should support women's rights defenders, health care staff, shelters for women victims of violence, family planning organisations and humanitarian assistance workers by enabling them to continue playing their essential role in assisting women during the pandemic.

On 19 May, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development during a hearing on "Lessons for future public health emergencies from an effective and rights-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic". She highlighted the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by many groups of people whose rights were already largely neglected in the past, including older persons, people with disabilities, Roma, homeless people, refugees, migrants and people held in detention. She underlined the need to ensure the universality and affordability of health coverage. Health inequalities should also be addressed through the broader issues of poverty and social determinants of health.

On 20 May, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) concerning the high numbers of deaths due to COVID-19 in **long-term care facilities** throughout Europe, affecting **older persons and persons with disabilities in particular**. The Commissioner stressed that a number of long-standing shortcomings affecting these institutions contributed to the high mortality rate, such as chronic understaffing, but also the lack of preparedness and a general failure to manage this crisis, including cases of abandonment and neglect. The Commissioner particularly deplored the conditions in which many residents lost their lives, alone and isolated from their families. The Commissioner emphasised member states' obligation to investigate and shed light on all these deaths and do all that is necessary for this tragedy never to be repeated. Commenting on reports that some residents of long-term care institutions were refused hospitalisation and did not receive potentially life-saving treatments, she drew attention to WHO guidelines indicating that residents of such institutions should be cared for in a health facility and to established ethical and human rights principles that criteria such as age or disability status should not be used for prioritisation of medical services. The Commissioner further stated that these developments confirmed the urgency of transitioning from institutional settings to community-based alternatives.

3. Other meetings

PACE Legal Affairs Committee hearing on COVID-19 and human rights

On 27 April, the Commissioner participated in the PACE Legal Affairs Committee hearing on the impact of COVID-19 on human rights and the rule of law.

The Commissioner joined the Chair of Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Boriss Cilevičs, and the chair of the Sub-committee on Human Rights, Vladimir Vardanyan, in a discussion on the compatibility of national emergency measures with human rights and democracy, the situation of members of vulnerable groups, misinformation and freedom of expression, and the possible legacy of the crisis.

A [video recording](#) of the exchange is available on the PACE YouTube channel.

Exchange with EP LIBE Committee on the Central Mediterranean

On 27 April, the Commissioner participated in an exchange with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament on the situation in the Central Mediterranean. In her remarks, the Commissioner noted that the right to life could not be adequately protected without sufficient search and rescue capacity deployed by states, and that increasing reliance on aerial surveillance exclusively was increasing the risk of returns to Libya. She discussed non-response and delays to distress calls, and the non-compatibility with human rights obligations of handing over responsibility to the Libyan Coast Guard. As regards disembarkation, she reiterated the need for a predictable system for responsibility sharing. She also reminded participants that it could no longer be ignored that various forms of support to the Libyan Coast Guard were leading to increased returns and to serious human rights violations. She called for clear human rights safeguards in any co-operation activity with third countries, to fill the current gap in terms of transparency and accountability.

A [video recording](#) of the exchange is available on the website of the European Parliament.

Webinar on “Digital Cooperation during COVID-19 and beyond”

On 13 May, the Commissioner participated in a “Digital Cooperation during COVID-19 and beyond” Joint Webinar hosted by UN Under Secretary-General Fabrizio Hochschild, ITU, WHO and OHCHR, on the topic of “Public Health, Digital Tools and Human Rights”. The Commissioner stressed that the Council of Europe has developed a variety of standards in this field. Emphasising that these standards offer some flexibility to adapt to difficult circumstances, she underlined that strong privacy and data protection safeguards must still remain in place. She stressed that sensitive personal data - such as health data – can be collected, used and stored by states only under exceptional and precise conditions and that these operations must be based on a law, pursue a legitimate aim, and be strictly necessary to the aim pursued. These requirements imply that any digital tool should be the least intrusive possible, and that digital measures should be lifted once the reason for introducing them no longer exists, i.e. once COVID-19 no longer represents a threat to public health. The Commissioner concluded by underscoring that the digital divide that still exists in Europe needs to be closed and that digital devices should be made available to the largest number of people possible.

Web event on “Challenges posed to human rights by COVID-19” organised by the Council of Europe Office in Georgia in co-operation with the Public Defender (Ombudsman)

On 14 May, the Commissioner took part in the above web event organised by the Council of Europe office in Georgia (in the framework of the project “Fight against Discrimination, Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in Georgia”) in partnership with the Georgia’s Public Defender’s (Ombudsman) Office. In her intervention, the Commissioner referred to her work on addressing various challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on human rights, including the right to health, freedom of expression, data protection, the human rights of older persons and persons with disabilities, prisoners and detainees, asylum seekers and migrants and LGBTI persons. She highlighted the important role played by National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and their networks in protecting human rights at the national level. The Commissioner also stressed the need to bridge existing inequalities in European societies, including by ensuring a more equal enjoyment of social and economic rights by all and providing young people with opportunities for work and study as part of recovery efforts.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly web dialogue ‘Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: camps and closed centres under lockdown’

On 26 May, the Commissioner participated in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s web dialogue ‘Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: camps and closed centres under lockdown’. In her intervention, the Commissioner noted that several initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic had put the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants under pressure, but that certain solutions had subsequently been found. As regards reception, however, she noted that where existing standards had already been low, COVID-19 was not only creating new problems, but amplifying existing ones. She noted that such problems had been allowed to develop and persist for various reasons, including political ones, and that underlying policies of exclusion, containment and deterrence would need to be addressed. With regard to immigration detention, the Commissioner noted some positive developments, where member states had released persons in detention due to COVID-19 related risks and the associated impossibilities of carrying out removals. However, she emphasised that it was necessary to look forward and start implementing alternatives to detention on a much larger scale, including by using the tools offered by the Council of Europe. She concluded by emphasising that ensuring respect for human rights standards and resilience in the face of crises were connected and called on parliamentarians to ensure human rights, shared responsibility, solidarity and accountability were put at the heart of asylum and migration policies.

A [recording of the web dialogue](#) is available on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

Exchange of views organised by the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

On 3 June the Commissioner participated in an exchange of views organised by the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. In her speech she called on states to give a renewed impetus to realising human rights for all, underscoring that three lessons could be drawn from the pandemic: the need for more equality, the urgency of avoiding procrastination in realising human rights for all, and the importance of strengthened multilateralism.

Georgia Inter-Agency Human Rights Council Meeting on “Human rights during the pandemic in Georgia”

At the invitation of the government of Georgia, on 12 June, the Commissioner took part in the Inter-Agency Human Rights Council Meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister. In her introductory remarks, the Commissioner emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing human rights problems in European societies and had a drastic impact on the human rights of different groups of individuals, including older persons, persons with disabilities, women, children, Roma, detainees, migrants, LGBTI people and media professionals. It also deeply affected the right to health, economic and social rights, as well as civil and political freedoms. She highlighted the key role played by National Human Rights Institutions and equality bodies in protecting human rights at the local level and encouraged the authorities to fully take into account their recommendations, as well as concerns expressed by vulnerable groups and to work with civil society groups to address and mitigate emerging challenges. She also recalled that National Human Rights Strategies can be effective tools to address a broad range of human rights issues in a coherent way.

Guest Lecture on human rights in a health emergency at the School of International Studies of the University of Trento

On 23 June, upon invitation from the School, the Commissioner gave an online guest lecture on “Respecting human rights in a health emergency and beyond”. She stressed that across Europe, the COVID-19 crisis impacted on a wide range of human rights. Unprecedented lockdown restrictions imposed by governments had put the enjoyment of these rights at risk and exacerbated long-standing problems, often exposing the weaknesses that had already been undermining Europe’s human rights protection system. The Commissioner sought to respond to these challenges by raising awareness about the impact on human rights of COVID-19 and measures to counter it and assisting states with recommendations on how to shape their response to the pandemic. In the lecture, she focused particularly on the position of older persons; the importance of ensuring women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights; and the need to ensure compliance of digital tools aimed at containing the spread of infections with human rights standards.

Video conference with the Federal Ombudsperson of the Russian Federation, Tatiana Moskalkova

On 23 June, the Commissioner held a video conference with Tatiana Moskalkova, High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation (Federal Ombudsperson), to discuss the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the Federal Ombudsperson informed the Commissioner about the action taken by her Office to ensure that measures imposed to fight coronavirus in Russia are compliant with human rights standards. The discussion also focused on freedom of assembly; the situation of persons deprived of their liberty; domestic violence and women’s rights; minority language rights; and the situation of human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists in Russia and several other Council of Europe member states. The Commissioner paid particular attention to the criminal prosecution of Svetlana Prokopyeva, Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, Yuri Dmitriev, Yulia Tsvetkova and Anastasia Shevchenko in various regions of the Russian Federation. Lastly, the Commissioner and the Federal Ombudsperson explored possibilities for future co-operation on various human rights issues.

4. Human Rights Defenders

During the period under review, the Commissioner issued a series of [statements](#) concerning the human rights implications of the COVID-19 crisis where she particularly highlighted the crucial role played by human rights defenders and civil society organisations in aiding the most vulnerable persons. Notably, the Commissioner commended the outstanding work done by NGOs, social workers and volunteers in assisting persons with disabilities; providing help to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers; supporting Roma; and defending women's rights during the pandemic. The Commissioner also urged all Council of Europe member states to support human rights defenders and NGOs and ensure that they can carry out their activities in a safe and enabling environment (see also the relevant themes).

On 11 May, the Commissioner addressed a [letter](#) to the Prime Minister of Malta concerning the situation of migrants rescued in the Mediterranean in which she highlighted, among other things, that all member states should seek constructive dialogue and co-operation with NGOs carrying out search and rescue activities at sea. She also emphasised that states should ensure an enabling environment for the work of human rights defenders and refrain from criminalising, stigmatising or otherwise harassing them (see also *Section 2: Reports and continuous dialogue*).

On 15 May, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia in which she raised concerns about the alarming situation of LGBTI activists in some member states, who continue to receive threats, become victims of physical attacks or suffer from other forms of reprisals motivated by hate against LGBTI people. To remedy the situation, the Commissioner urged political leaders to condemn incitement to hatred publicly, to protect LGBTI rights defenders and ensure that any forms of hate speech or crimes are investigated and prosecuted (see also *Human rights of LGBTI people*).

5. System of the European Convention on Human Rights

Hearing of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of M.A. v. Denmark

On 10 June 2020, the Commissioner participated in the Grand Chamber hearing in *M.A. v. Denmark*, dealing with the three-year waiting period for family reunification applied to persons receiving temporary protection.

The Commissioner stressed that the issue of family reunification is key to the lives of many people receiving international protection in Europe. She observed that a number of Council of Europe member states, including Denmark, have introduced restrictions limiting the family reunification rights of persons with subsidiary or temporary protection, whilst such restrictions have not been applied to persons recognised as refugees. In light of the similar situation of persons with such other statuses to those defined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the fact that their need for protection is in practice almost never temporary, the Commissioner emphasised that differential treatment with regard to family reunification, and in particular subjecting them to a waiting period, cannot be objectively and reasonably justified.

Her [oral intervention](#) has been published on her website.

6. Communication and Information work

More than 360 news items were published by national and international media outlets covering the Commissioner's work during the period under review. The main topics that the press covered concerned the Commissioner's work on human rights topics affected by the measures adopted to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commissioner's call to take urgent steps to protect the rights of prisoners in Europe was covered by *CAN, AFP, ANSA, APA, AskaNews, Athens Agency, Corriere della sera, Cyprus News Agency, Der Standard, DPA, El Nacional, El Punt Avui, Euronews, Express Online, France 24, Gazete Duvar, Golos Armenii, Il Manifesto, IN.gr, InfoBae, InfoPrisones, Krasnaya Vesna, La Repubblica, Le Muslim Post, Le Soir, Le Vif, L'Orient-Le Jour, Mandiner, MTI, News.bg, Rapsi, Reporter.gr, RFI, SDA/ATS, Spiegel Online, Sputnik, Ta Nea, The Associated Press, The Canadian Press, The Guardian, To Thema, Ukrinform, Vijesti, Wiener Zeitung, Zougla.gr, El Pais, Europa Press, La Vanguardia, Naiz, and RTVE.*

The Commissioner's work on LGBTI was reported by *AFP, Deutschlandfunk Nova, DPA, Euronews, Il Fatto Quotidiano, La Repubblica, LGBTQ Nation, Metro Weekly, PinkNews, RTBF, The Huffington Post, The Independent, 7sur7, ACI Prensa, Agence Belga, Agence Europe, Agencia Lusa, AGI, ANSA, Berner Zeitung, Blick Online, Der Bund, Der Tagesspiegel, DW, EFE, FENA, Forbes, Gay.it, Gazeta Wyborcza, La Estrella, La Libre Belgique, La Razon, La Vanguardia, Le Figaro, Le Matin, Linkiesta.it, Los Angeles Times, Notizie Geopolitiche, PSNews, Puls24, Reuters, RFI, Rolling Stone, SDA/ATS, Spiegel Online, Stern, Swiss Info, Tageszeitung, The Associated Press, The Canadian Press, The Guardian, Tiroler Tages Anzeiger, US News, Valeurs Actuelles, Zeit Online, Global Voices, Jusrist, and Yle.*

*Associated Press, the New York Times, ANSA, ABC, AFP, Agence Europe, AGI, ANSA, AVGI, Avvenire, Berliner Zeitung, Cyprus Mail, DPA, EFE, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Il Dubbio, La Croix, La Presse, La Vanguardia, La Voz Digital, Left.it, Lëtzebuenger Journal, Luxemburger Wort, MAP, MTI, NTB, RTV Slovenija, Sky TG24, STA, The Associated Press, Times of Malta, Ukrinform, Webradio.hu, Agence Belga, AnsaMed, Demokrata.hu, InfoMigrants, La Libre Belgique, Malta Today, National Post, Reuters, Ouest France, The Malta Independent, The New Humanitarian, The Washington Post, and Times of Malta covered the Commissioner's work on migration. Numerous media outlets reported the Commissioner's call to ensure rescue at sea and allow safe disembarkation during the COVID-19 crisis (*AFP, Anadolou Agency, ANSA, ARD Tagesschau, Athens News Agency, AVGI, BETA, Capital.gr, Daily Sabah, Danas, DPA, EPD, Gals Istre, Het Nieuwsblad, Hina, Hurriyet News, Index.hr, InfoMigrants, Jutarnji List, Knack, le Figaro, Leeward Courant, Libération, MIA, Naftemporiki.gr, Newsbeast.gr, ORF, Ritzau, Sofokleousin.gr, Spiegel Online, The Independent Online, TRT Haber, Vecer, and Zeit Online*).*

The statement on media freedom was reported by *Agence Europe, Aljazeera Balkans, Armenian Reporter, ANSA, Avaz.ba, Balkan Insight, Beta, BTA, Danas, Demokracija, DW, Ekho Kavkaza, FaceNews.ua, Fonet, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Il Fatto Quotidiano, Interfax, Kommersant, Krstarica, MediaPool.bg, Mladina, N1 Info, Nacional, Narod.hr, News.am, Oslobodjenje, Panorama, Press.pl, Radio Slobodna Evropa, Reporter.gr, Reporter.si, STA, SwissInfo, The Associated Press, The New York Times, Turan, Vijesti, and Zougla.gr.*

The statement on ensuring women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights during the COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned by *AFP, Agence Europe, Dnevnik.bg, Emerging Europe, EurActiv, Euronews, Linkiesta.it, News.bg, ORF, Reuters, Stern, The Associated Press, Tut.by, ActuDaily.com, Aertzteblatt, Cyprus Mail, DPA, and openDemocracy.*

Covering the annual activity report, *Agence Europe, Balkan Insight, EFE, El Diario, El Periodico, EPD, Exit News, La Vanguardia, L'azione, N1, Ref.ch, Reporter.gr, RP-online, Sputnik, and Stuttgarter Nachrichten* focused on the intensification of the challenges to human rights.

An op-ed on data protection was published in several national news outlets, including *Deutsche Welle, Contributors.ro, Danas, Expreso, Gazeta Wyborcza, Kommersant, Le Temps, L'Espresso, N1 Info, Dnevnik, and Protothema.gr.*

The statement on COVID-19 and human rights was covered by *AskaNews, BBC World, Delphi, DW, Il Manifesto, Jurista Vards, Tele1 TV, The Associated Press, Turan, and Vita.it.*

The Commissioner's call to ensure equal protection and care for Roma and Travellers during the COVID-19 crisis was covered by *BHRT, Danas, DPA, Fena, N1 Info, Reporter.gr, Ria Novosti, Romea.cz, and Zougla.gr.*

An op-ed on ethnic profiling was published by *openDemocracy*, while *Euronews* referred to a previous Human Rights Comment that the Commissioner published on this topic.

The Commissioner's work on transitional justice in the Balkans was reported by *Aljazeera Balkans, Beta, Danas, Dnevni Avaz, FENA, HINA, Krstarica, Le Monde, N1 Info, Nezavisne Novine, Radio Sarajevo, Reuters, Slobodna Bosna, Tanjug, The Jerusalem Post, Today Online, and US News.*

The Commissioner's letter to the Chair and members of the National Council Committee on Security Policy of Switzerland in which she urged lawmakers to review draft legislation on police counterterrorism measures was covered by *20 Minutes, 24 heures, AWP, Basler Zeitung, Berner Zeitung, Blick, Cash, Der Bund, Jam News, Le Matin, Le Nouvelliste, Le Temps, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Radio LFM, Swiss Info, Tages Anzeiger, Tribune de Genève, Corriere del Ticino, Der Landbote, L'Express, L'impartial, RSI, RTS, SDA/ATS, Tages Anzeiger, Tio.ch, and Zürichsee Zeitung.*

The call to draw the lessons from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care facilities was covered by *Agence Europe, Agencia Lusa, APA, BZT.at, Diario Libre, DPA, EFE, El Diario, La Vanguardia, Mandiner, MTI, Neues Volksblatt, O Jornal Economico, Reporter.gr, RTP, Spiegel Online, Yahoo Noticias, and Zougla.gr.*

AFP, BBC, Channel News Asia, France 24, Interfax, Kommersant, RFI, RIA Novosti, Rosbalt, Vatican News, VoA, Yahoo News, Agence Europe, DPA, Interfax, Kavkazskiy Uzel, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Sputnik, TASS, Turan, Weduza, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, RFE/RL, and openDemocracy covered the Commissioner's work on freedom of expression.

Other coverage focused on press freedom (*Albanian Daily News, Argumentum, N1 Info, Strana.ua, Ukrainski Novyny, The Irish Times, Agenzia Nova, AGI, ANSA, Articolo 21, Avanti Online, Corriere della Sera, Corriere di Como, Danas, DW, Faedrelandsvennen, Open, and Turan*), human rights defenders in the Russian Federation (*DW, EFE, Interfax, and TASS*), *the Report on Bulgaria (Novaya Gazeta, Radio Svobodna Evropa, and SeeNews)*, right to health (*Agence Europe*), persons with

disabilities (*ANSA*), justice system (*News.am*), Roma (*TAZ*) the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide (*AFP*), equality bodies (*Modern Diplomacy*, *MTI*, and *Webradio.hu*), and the report on Moldova (*Alfa News*, and *Balkan Insight*).

More than 90 000 unique visitors consulted the Commissioner's website during the period under review, an increase of almost 10% compared to the previous quarter and almost twice as much compared to the second quarter of 2019.

The work on social media platforms continued as well, in particular on twitter where the Commissioner published 86 tweets, earning an increase of over 2 000 followers.