

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ

2ND QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT 2022

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 2022.

1. Visits and Missions

Visit to Ukraine

From 2 to 7 May, the Commissioner carried out a [visit](#) to Ukraine's capital Kyiv and its region. The Commissioner's visit was the latest element of her continuous engagement in the response to the human rights consequences of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

During her visit, the Commissioner met with the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Emine Dzhaparova; the Minister of Justice, Denys Maliuska; the Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Ihor Zhovkva; the then Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Iryna Venediktova; the then Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmyla Denisova; the Government's Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, Kateryna Levchenko; the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko; and mayors and municipal officials from several localities in the Kyiv region. She also met with the Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Refat Chubarov, many human rights defenders and representatives of civil society, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and conducted interviews with victims and witnesses of serious human rights violations and their relatives.

The Commissioner observed that the extent and gravity of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that had taken place as a result of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine were staggering. The Commissioner noted the mounting evidence of widespread arbitrary killings, deliberate targeting of civilians and journalists, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, instances of sexual violence, as well as reports of missing persons and widespread arbitrary detention, reportedly committed by Russian troops in areas under their control. The Commissioner's field visit to Bucha, Borodyanka and Irpin, in the Kyiv region, which have been particularly affected by hostilities, provided a painful illustration of the extent of such egregious violations. She called for human rights and international humanitarian law to be respected by all and in all circumstances.

The Commissioner further observed that the war had severely affected the enjoyment of virtually all human rights by people in Ukraine. It led to disruptions in the provision of basic services and livelihoods, disproportionately affecting the human rights of persons at heightened risk, such as women, children, older people, persons with disabilities and those living in care institutions. It also resulted in the internal and external displacement of millions of people. The Commissioner observed that many victims, especially those who had suffered deep trauma, urgently required adequate medical and psychosocial assistance. She called for the continuation and scaling up of the humanitarian response and for generous and sustainable support to be given by members of the international community to Ukraine's efforts to repair and rebuild the infrastructure damaged or destroyed by the war.

Stressing the need for accountability, the Commissioner noted that delivering justice for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and providing redress and support for victims and their families would be an incredibly daunting but imperative task. She commended the

Ukrainian authorities for having taken important steps to this end and for their commitment to ensuring accountability, in full compliance with applicable human rights standards and with due respect for the dignity of victims and their families. She committed to assisting them on this path and stressed the need for the proper coordination of the many national and international processes aimed at ensuring accountability running in parallel. The Commissioner also paid tribute to the courage and commitment of Ukraine's human rights defenders.

The Commissioner's [memorandum](#) on her visit to Ukraine has been published on the Commissioner's website.

Mission to Kosovo*

The Commissioner undertook a [mission](#) to Kosovo from 30 May to 3 June. Taking place in the context of the Commissioner's continuous human rights monitoring work, the mission focused on issues relating to transitional justice and social cohesion, freedom of the media, and key aspects of women's rights and gender equality.

During the mission, the Commissioner had discussions with the President, Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu; the Prime Minister, Albin Kurti; the First Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Development and Dialogue, Besnik Bislimi; the Third Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Issues and Human Rights, Emilija Redžepi; the Minister of Justice, Albulena Haxhiu; the Minister of Internal Affairs, Xhelal Sveçla; and the Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Arbërie Nagavci. She also met with representatives of the international community: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK, Caroline Ziadeh; the Head of the OSCE Mission, Ambassador Michael Davenport; the EU Special Representative, Ambassador Tomáš Szunyog; the Head of EULEX, Ambassador Lars-Gunnar Wigemark; and the Chief of Mission of UNHCR, Erol Arduç. Furthermore, she held meetings with the Ombudsperson, Naim Qelaj, as well as with representatives of civil society and media in Pristina and in north Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. The Commissioner also visited the Visoki Dečani Monastery, a UNESCO world heritage site, and met with a returnee from a Serb non-majority community in Gjakovë/Đakovica.

In her discussions pertaining to transitional justice and social cohesion, the Commissioner paid particular attention to the search for persons still missing in the wake of the 1990s conflict, the fight against impunity for wartime crimes, access to reparations for victims of war-related sexual violence, the language rights of non-majority communities, and major impediments to sustainable returns of displaced persons. In the sphere of freedom of the media, while noting the vibrant and diverse media landscape in Kosovo, the Commissioner raised issues regarding the safety of journalists and the obstacles they face in conducting their work, as well as ethical journalism and public service media. Finally, concerning women's rights and gender equality, the Commissioner discussed in particular access to employment and to education for women and girls, as well as the protection of victims of domestic violence.

The Commissioner's memorandum on her mission to Kosovo is forthcoming.

* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Visit to the United Kingdom

The Commissioner [visited](#) the United Kingdom (UK) between 27 June and 1 July. The visit focused on the overall system for human rights protection in the UK, human rights in Northern Ireland (especially the legacy of the Troubles) and children's rights.

During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice and Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP; the Minister of State (Minister for South and Central Asia, North Africa, United Nations and the Commonwealth) of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon; and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, Tom Pursglove MP. She also met with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and the Victims and Survivors Forum, and the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. In addition, the Commissioner met with civil society and academics, and with children and young people on different topics covered by the visit. In the context of the visit, the Commissioner also held online meetings with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State of the Northern Ireland Office, Lord Caine; the Welsh Minister for Justice, Jane Hutt MS; the Welsh Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution, Mick Antoniw MS; the Scottish Minister for Equalities and Older People, Christina McKelvie MSP; and the Scottish Minister for Children and Young People, Clare Haughney MSP; as well as the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Children and Young People's Commissioner of Scotland.

At the end of her visit, the Commissioner expressed concern that the proposal to repeal and replace the Human Rights Act 1998 would make significant changes to the way in which people could bring cases to UK courts and have their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (Convention) effectively enforced. She also highlighted that the reforms would alter the interpretation of Convention rights and widen the gap between the protection of those rights accorded by UK courts and the European Court of Human Rights. The Commissioner also expressed worry that the proposed reforms might send the wrong signal beyond the country's borders at a time when human rights are under pressure throughout Europe.

She also stressed that the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill raised serious questions about the extent to which the proposed mechanism to review Troubles-related cases would be compliant with Convention standards on independent and effective investigations. The possibility to grant immunity from prosecution on a low evidentiary bar raised concerns that this could lead to impunity. She also recalled the need to ensure the independence and effectiveness of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the urgency of tackling threats to media freedom, and the importance of broadening the availability and accessibility of integrated education in Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner furthermore called for children's rights to be put centre stage across the whole of the UK. She highlighted child poverty as a particularly serious human rights problem, with certain elements of the overall social security system specifically impacting on this. She also stressed the importance of better addressing the mental health needs of children, their right to a healthy environment, children's interaction with the police and the justice system, and human rights education and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Finally, the Commissioner expressed concern about the impact of an increasingly hostile public discourse in the UK on both young and adult trans persons, and LGBTI people in general. She recalled that rhetoric stigmatising trans people, including by representing them as a threat, is unacceptable, and she called on the authorities to speak out clearly against such narratives.

The Commissioner's report on her visit to the United Kingdom is forthcoming.

2. Reports and continuous dialogue

Report on Austria

On 12 May, the Commissioner published the [report](#) following her visit to Austria from 13 to 17 December 2021, with recommendations on improving the reception and integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and on strengthening women's rights and gender equality.

The Commissioner called on the authorities to address shortcomings in reception conditions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, through the adoption of harmonised standards regarding reception centres and cooperation with the provinces, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable people, and especially unaccompanied children. She also emphasised the importance of strengthening independent and quality legal counselling by legally safeguarding the structural and functional independence of the competent federal agency. In the field of integration, the Commissioner invited the authorities to speed up family reunification procedures for unaccompanied children, provide beneficiaries of subsidiary protection with the same favourable rules as refugees, and ease access to long-term residence and to citizenship. Concerned about credible allegations of pushbacks pointing to the existence of an established practice, the Commissioner urged the authorities to ensure that independent and effective investigations are carried out into allegations of pushbacks and ill-treatment by members of security forces in that context, and to put an end to these practices.

Regarding women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Commissioner called on the authorities to complement the sexuality education curricula, to subsidise counselling on contraception and contraceptives and to cover these under public health insurance or reimbursement schemes or provide them free of charge. She also urged the authorities to cover the costs of abortion care under public health insurance and ensure effective access to abortion services throughout the country.

The Commissioner further called for resolute measures to improve the response of the justice system to acts of violence against women including by building trust between police and victims and improving the prosecution and conviction rates in such cases. She also stressed the need to raise awareness about the means provided by the legislative package on online hate to victims of digital violence against women, and to safeguard the best interests of the child, including by ensuring that custody rules protect children from any violent parent. The Commissioner underscored that a significant increase in the federal and provincial budgets related to the fight against all forms of violence against women was required to implement all the necessary measures.

As regards gender equality, the Commissioner called on the authorities to address the gender pay gap and gender pension gap as matters of priority and significantly improve the availability of high-quality childcare support to facilitate women's re-entry into the labour market.

The report is available on the Commissioner's website, along with the comments of the Austrian authorities.

Letter to Home Secretary of the United Kingdom on the possible extradition of Julian Assange

On 18 May, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) in which she called on UK Home Secretary Priti Patel not to extradite Julian Assange. Writing in view of the impending decision on Mr Assange's extradition, the Commissioner noted that the wider human rights implications of doing so had not yet been adequately considered in the extradition proceedings. She highlighted that the indictment by the United States against Mr Assange raised important questions about the protection of those that publish classified information in the public interest, including information that exposes human rights violations. She concluded that allowing Mr Assange's extradition on this basis would have a chilling effect on media freedom and could ultimately hamper the press in performing its task as purveyor of information and public watchdog in democratic societies.

The letter is available on the Commissioner's website along with the reply from the Home Secretary.

Letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice of Bulgaria on protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence

On 20 May, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice of Bulgaria, calling on the Bulgarian authorities to improve the legal and institutional protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence. She especially urged them to repeal the requirement of "systematic" violence provided by the Criminal Code regarding offences committed in the context of domestic violence, which exposes victims to serious risks, limits the possibilities to sanction perpetrators and sends a dangerous message to society that domestic violence is acceptable. She also reiterated her previous recommendations about the need to address the severe lack of support services for victims of domestic violence and to enhance measures to promote equality between women and men, including through awareness raising, training and education to challenge sexist prejudices.

The letter is available on the Commissioner's website along with the reply from the Minister of Justice of Bulgaria.

Letter to the President of the Estonian Parliament regarding amendments to the State Borders Act

On 23 May, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) to the President of the Estonian Parliament calling for amendments to a bill which, if adopted, would allow border guards to refuse applications for international protection if not made at the designated border crossings, and pushbacks in situations of emergency with a mass influx of migrants. Recalling her recent [Recommendation](#) on ending pushbacks, the Commissioner stressed the importance of individual assessments to protect against *refoulement* and uphold the human rights of people arriving at the border. The Commissioner emphasised that, even when dealing with challenging border situations, Council of Europe member states should respect human rights and treat migrants and asylum seekers humanely. Having expressed her deep appreciation for Estonia's generous welcome of refugees from Ukraine, she

noted that all people in need of protection should be handled in a fair manner, irrespective of their background and manner of arrival.

The letter is available on the Commissioner's website along with the reply from the Chair of the Constitutional Committee of the Estonian Parliament.

Letter to the Minister of the Interior of Hungary on refugee protection issues

On 21 June, the Commissioner published her [letter](#) to the Minister of the Interior of Hungary, Sándor Pintér, regarding refugee protection issues. While expressing her appreciation to the Hungarian authorities and people for maintaining an open border policy and welcoming all those fleeing the war in Ukraine, she raised concerns about the longer-term perspectives for non-Ukrainians who are excluded from the temporary protection scheme and have no possibility under the current law to apply for asylum in Hungary. The Commissioner stressed that the differentiation by government officials of Ukrainians as 'real refugees' and those fleeing atrocities and war elsewhere as economic migrants was contradictory to the core principle that human rights exist to protect everyone. She urged the Minister to pursue the establishment of an asylum system in line with Hungary's international protection obligations, for the benefit of all persons fleeing Ukraine who do not fall under the temporary protection scheme and for everyone else who seeks a fair assessment of their asylum claim in Hungary.

3. Themes

Impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights

In addition to the visit to Ukraine, referred to above, in the reference period the Commissioner's engagement on the human rights consequences of the war in Ukraine has included direct exchanges with Ukrainian authorities, institutions and human rights defenders as well as statements on specific human rights issues and the situation of particularly vulnerable persons.

Thus, on 6 April, the Commissioner [reacted](#) to reports of extrajudicial killings of civilians in Bucha and other localities in the Kyiv region previously under the control of Russian troops. Noting that such acts may constitute war crimes, the Commissioner called for all of them to be documented and thoroughly investigated, and their perpetrators identified and brought to justice.

On 8 April, the Commissioner [reacted](#) to reports of a Russian ballistic missile attack on the railway station in Kramatorsk in eastern Ukraine, which claimed the lives of dozens of civilian evacuees and injured hundreds more. She called for those responsible for such atrocities to be held accountable. She further stressed that all those who wished to leave areas affected by or at risk of hostilities should be allowed to do so safely.

On 20 April, the Commissioner [expressed](#) concern about the lives and human rights of those who remained trapped by intense fighting in Ukraine's south-eastern city of Mariupol, besieged by Russian forces. She called for the immediate provision of humanitarian corridors to enable civilians to evacuate to safety and for captured soldiers and those who surrender, as well as the wounded and sick, to be treated humanely and with respect for their inherent dignity and basic human rights.

On 22 April, the Commissioner held an on-line meeting with a group of Ukrainian human rights defenders (see below, Human Rights Defenders). On 28 April, the Commissioner met in Strasbourg with the then Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights of Ukraine, Liudmyla Denisova. Their discussion revolved around the reported patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law resulting from the war in Ukraine, including allegations of forcible deportations of Ukrainian people to the Russian Federation and reports of war-related sexual violence, and the Parliamentary Commissioner's work aimed at protecting the human rights of victims of such violations.

On 20 May, the Commissioner met on-line with Iryna Venediktova, the then Prosecutor General of Ukraine, to discuss their participation in the [podcast](#) of the Alliance for Peacebuilding aimed at raising public awareness on war-related sexual violence in Ukraine, and to relay information about technical and documentation assistance which several non-governmental organisations offered to make available to Ukraine's investigative authorities.

On 31 May, the Commissioner [reacted](#) to an attack on a convoy evacuating civilians in the Luhansk region, in which French journalist Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff was killed. Calling the attack an intolerable act that must not go unpunished, she noted that it was a sad reminder of the dangers faced by those who cover armed conflicts.

On 8 June, the Commissioner met with a delegation from the Ukrainian Parliament's committees on EU-Ukraine parliamentary association and Ukraine's integration into the EU. Discussions covered reported patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law resulting from the war in Ukraine, including allegations of forcible deportations of Ukrainian people to the Russian Federation and of war-related sexual violence attributable to Russian troops. The Commissioner shared her concerns about the Ukrainian Parliament's recent sudden dismissal of the country's Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (see below, National Human Rights Structures). She also reiterated her call on Ukraine to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

On 10 June, the Commissioner facilitated an online meeting between non-governmental organisations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo with experience in assisting victims of sexual violence, and a group of Ukrainian organisations, professionals and volunteers involved in providing such assistance, to exchange information and provide expert advice on issues related to assistance, support services and reparation for victims of war-related sexual violence.

On 22 June, the Commissioner participated in the Joint Hearing on "Developing mechanisms and concrete means to detect crimes of sexual violence of armed conflict and support the rehabilitation of survivors" organised by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence. The Commissioner highlighted the need to detect conflict-related sexual violence and assist survivors as a priority through an adequate legal framework, swift and rigorous investigations and a victim-centred approach, with the overarching aim of ensuring justice, accountability and prompt and adequate reparations for victims.

Human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

The protection of the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants continued to be a central area of focus for the Commissioner during this reporting period. The issue was covered in the report

following the country visit to Austria, and through letters to the governments of Estonia and Hungary (see above, in Reports and continuous dialogue).

One important part of the Commissioner's work in this thematic area was the publication, on 7 April, of her [Recommendation](#) '*Pushed beyond the limits: Four areas of urgent action to end human rights violations at Europe's borders*'. The Recommendation highlights the multiple violations of human rights that occur when states engage in pushbacks at their land and sea borders. It shows that pushbacks have become a widespread phenomenon in Europe and risk becoming a permanent feature of the way in which refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are treated across the continent. It outlines four key areas of action needed to end pushbacks. Firstly, states must re-focus on the implementation, in good faith, of their human rights obligations, in particular those set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, and on giving practical effect to the enjoyment of those rights by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants at borders. The Recommendation addresses some possible misconceptions about these obligations and gives recommendations on upholding human rights even in challenging situations. Secondly, states must enhance transparency of border control activities, in particular through strengthening independent monitoring to prevent and identify violations and bolstering mechanisms to ensure accountability. Thirdly, member states must acknowledge pushbacks as a pan-European problem requiring collective action by all member states. This entails that governments speak out clearly against pushbacks and hold their peers to account when common standards are not upheld, both bilaterally and in multilateral settings. It also entails addressing factors incentivising pushbacks, such as the lack of effective responsibility sharing across Europe. Fourthly, parliamentarians, acting both as lawmakers and as the cornerstone of democratic oversight, must mobilise to stand up against pushbacks, including by holding their governments to account and by preventing the adoption of laws or policies that are not human rights compliant. In the Recommendation, the Commissioner recalls that Council of Europe member states cannot afford to continue carrying out human rights violations, nor to silently condone the normalisation of unlawful practices by other member states, as this avoidance of responsibility undermines the rule of law and sets Europe on course towards permanently losing important protections for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

On 27 April, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of PACE, which took place in the context of the preparation of PACE's report on 'Pushbacks on land and sea: illegal measures of migration management'. The Commissioner highlighted the key points in her Recommendation on pushbacks mentioned above, focusing in particular on those relating to the role of parliamentarians in ending and preventing pushbacks, including strengthening legislative scrutiny; using their mandates to carry out fact-finding and monitoring activities; resorting to tools such as parliamentary inquiries into allegations of pushbacks; and challenging stigmatising rhetoric against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

On 14 April, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) on the United Kingdom's announced intention to offshore asylum processing to Rwanda as a response to irregular Channel crossings, which, she said, sent a worrying signal. She underlined that the plans not only raised questions about the protection of the human rights of the people involved, but also risked seriously undermining the global system of international protection. The Commissioner emphasised the importance of safe and legal routes and of putting human rights at the heart of the response to Channel crossings in order to address the problem of dangerous crossings and remove the conditions in which the smuggling of migrants can flourish.

On 20 June, World Refugee Day, the Commissioner [recalled](#) that pushbacks were a widespread pan-European human rights problem and that states must tackle it as such. She highlighted that the response to people fleeing the war in Ukraine showed that respecting human dignity and international obligations is both necessary and possible.

Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom

On 18 April, three years after the killing of journalist Lyra McKee from Northern Ireland, the Commissioner [highlighted](#) that all must be done to protect journalists, especially those covering organised crime, paramilitary activities and legacy issues in Northern Ireland.

In a video message for a conference on "Freedom of expression in political speech" hosted by the University of Geneva and the Council of Europe Task Force on freedom of expression on 28 April, the Commissioner focused on the crucial role that free speech plays in a sound democracy, the responsibility it carries and the trends undermining it that she has observed in several member states. She referred specifically to a worrying retrogression in the safety of some politicians, human rights defenders and journalists and to increasing restrictions on their ability to work. She also underscored the importance of a more responsible political debate in which politicians respect the limits of free speech and therefore avoid speech that advances racist, antisemitic, homophobic, misogynist or otherwise undemocratic ideas.

On 28 April, the Commissioner gave a [keynote speech](#) at the Roman Broadmann colloquium on media freedom in states of emergency in which she stressed that states can and should improve the safety of journalists who cover conflicts by implementing available standards. States have a positive duty to protect individuals under their jurisdiction, including by preventing and punishing any harm caused by state and non-state actors alike.

The topic was further developed in a [Human Rights Comment](#) on the safety of journalists covering conflict situations, published on 2 May. The Commissioner underscored the applicable standards and urged states to close the gap between norms and reality. She suggested a number of measures to move toward that goal, including supporting initiatives of journalists' associations and media organisations, for example those aimed at collecting and distributing protective gear; facilitating and supporting combat and first aid training; ensuring diplomatic, military and logistical assistance to evacuate or relocate journalists; providing psychological assistance to journalists and their family members; and respecting the confidentiality of journalistic sources. The Commissioner stressed that while states cannot prevent all dangers that journalists may face on the battlefield, they have legal, financial and other means to reinforce journalists' safety.

Freedom of assembly

In a [statement](#) issued on 25 May, the Commissioner called for the financial and administrative harassment of members of civil society in Slovenia to stop, in the context of lawsuits claiming the reimbursement of police costs induced at unregistered rallies. The Commissioner noted that claiming police costs for public assemblies was contrary to national law and international human rights obligations on the right to freedom of assembly. She recalled her 2021 [Memorandum](#) on Slovenia, in which she expressed concern about attempts by some government officials to intimidate civil society activists and about disproportionate restrictions on freedom of assembly. She called for the lawsuits to be discontinued and for fines against all participants for taking part in peaceful demonstrations to be cancelled.

Women's rights and gender equality

On 1 April, the Commissioner participated in the [Regional Gender Equality Forum for the Western Balkans](#), hosted in Montenegro by the AIRE Centre where she spoke about “Fighting violence against women and girls by promoting gender equality”. The Commissioner stressed the importance of access to justice for women survivors of gender-based violence during and after conflicts, the need to counter attacks on the Istanbul Convention and to address gender stereotypes by promoting gender equality. She also focused on how women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights are key to combating discrimination and violence against women.

On 20 June, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) a vote in the Ukrainian Parliament which cleared the way for the ratification by Ukraine of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention (which eventually took place on 18 July 2022). The Commissioner noted that this was a critical step to ensure that perpetrators of violence against women and domestic violence are punished and victims assisted in Ukraine, including during war.

On 23 June, a member of the Office of the Commissioner intervened in the Final Dissemination [Conference](#) on “Women travelling to seek abortion care in Europe: the impact of barriers to legal abortion on women living in countries with ostensibly liberal abortion laws”, hosted in Barcelona by the Europe Abortion Access BAR2LEGAB project. The intervention was an opportunity to mention the recent work of the Commissioner on women’s access to abortion in several member states and to reiterate the Commissioner’s recommendations for improving access to abortion by removing legal, financial or other barriers including in the context of human rights crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Children's rights

On 7 April, the Commissioner [intervened](#) at the High-Level Launching Conference of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027 in Rome. She welcomed the comprehensive approach of the Strategy given the interdependence of children’s rights challenges related, for instance, to poverty, marginalisation and mental health. The Commissioner emphasised the centrality of effective child participation in all matters that affect them, stressing that children are directly impacted by the key challenges facing society, often disproportionately so.

On 20 June, the Commissioner inaugurated an exhibition of the [War Childhood Museum](#) held at the Council of Europe during the PACE session, together with PACE President Tiny Kox, the Museum’s Founder and President, Jasminko Halilović, and the Museum’s Ukraine project manager, Svitlana Osipchuk. Emphasising the devastating long-term effects of war on children, the Commissioner urged decision makers to listen to children’s voices and ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children.

Human rights of persons with disabilities

On 21 April, the Commissioner published a [Human Rights Comment](#) on addressing the invisibility of women and girls with disabilities, in which she stressed that their exclusion from decision-making spaces masks the root causes of their discrimination, allows the perpetuation of harmful gender and disability stereotypes, and leads to human rights violations. The Commissioner deplored the widespread violence against women and girls with disabilities – including violations of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, often linked to their deprivation of legal capacity – and called

again on all member states to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention. Highlighting the increased risk of sexual violence and the numerous barriers faced by these women and girls in emergencies and conflict situations such as the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, she urged member states to ensure that humanitarian support reaches them and to pay attention to their specific needs and avoid secondary victimisation. Lastly, she underlined the need to ensure the full participation and involvement of women and girls with disabilities in policy, decision-making mechanisms and legislation affecting them and to prioritise de-institutionalisation and legal capacity reforms, and called for a firm commitment to reversing their exclusion and promoting their leadership.

Human rights of LGBTI people

On 17 May, on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), the Commissioner [called for](#) attention to the situation of LGBTI people impacted by the war in Ukraine. Regarding LGBTI people still in Ukraine, the Commissioner called for dedicated shelters to be adequately resourced and drew attention to the situation of transgender people who experience difficulties in leaving the country. She urged countries receiving Ukrainian LGBTI refugees to ensure their safe accommodation, access to specific healthcare and protection of family members. She also pointed out that LGBTI people from Belarus and Russia who found refuge in Ukraine may not be able to safely return to their country of origin and recalled her previous [recommendations](#) on handling LGBTI asylum seekers.

On 31 May, the Commissioner sent a keynote [message](#) to participants at a Seminar organised by the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) on the issue of early surgeries on intersex children. Referring to a 2015 [issue paper](#) by her Office, she recalled that such early surgeries conducted without informed consent violate intersex children's human rights. She encouraged Council of Europe member states to prohibit such practices and encouraged medical professionals to play a positive role in the meantime, by ensuring that parents receive support and non-discriminatory information, including through contacts with intersex people, and by recommending that non-medically necessary surgeries are postponed until the child is mature enough to decide about their own body.

On 24 June, the Commissioner [urged](#) the Istanbul authorities to repeal the latest ban on the Istanbul Pride and to ensure the safety and the right to peaceful assembly of participants, and reiterated that the human rights of LGBTI people in Türkiye need to be effectively protected. On 25 June, the Commissioner [expressed](#) her solidarity with the victims of the terrorist attack in Oslo as well as with members of the LGBTI community there, who were targeted.

Human rights of Roma

On 7 April, ahead of International Roma Day, the Commissioner [called](#) on Council of Europe member states to fight discrimination and prejudices against Roma fleeing the war in Ukraine. States should increase awareness of the vulnerabilities and difficulties faced by Roma fleeing the war; provide humanitarian assistance, including emergency and permanent shelter and adequate transportation, to all without any discrimination; and scale up consultations with Roma networks and NGOs. States must also protect Ukrainian Roma women and children from the risk of trafficking and exploitation and gender-based violence.

A message delivered on 19 May, on behalf of the Commissioner for an event on “The Role of the Media in Combating Antigypsyism”, organised by the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Team and the European Commission, emphasised the need for the media to help debunk prejudices against Roma through training within the media and the enforcement of codes of ethics for journalists.

Social rights

Ahead of World Health Day, on 6 April, the Commissioner published her statement ‘[Inclusive and resilient health care for all – are we closer?](#)’. Reflecting on the lessons learnt two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, she highlighted the importance of prompt and accurate information outreach during health emergencies and the need for targeted and timely focus on particularly vulnerable groups to save lives. She also called on member states to expand their global solidarity to build effective resilience against current and future health threats.

Transitional justice

On 31 May, the Commissioner [condemned](#) the banning of the annual White Armband Day walk in Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which commemorates the victims of war crimes committed there in 1992-1993. She called for the facilitation of civic expression and the countering of the denial of war crimes.

On 30 June, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Commissioner [stressed](#) that the ICC is needed more than ever as a pillar of the international criminal justice system and the fight against impunity. She called on the few Council of Europe member states that have not done so yet to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC. She emphasised the importance of political, technical, and financial support to the ICC, stressing that it should be sustained in the long term, be respectful of the Court’s independence, and aimed at structurally strengthening the institution so that it can deliver justice to victims across all relevant situations. The Commissioner pointed out that holding the perpetrators of the worst crimes to account is the condition to prevent future atrocities and preserve peace.

Human Rights Education

On 12 April the Commissioner addressed the [Forum on Human Rights and Citizenship Education](#) held in Turin via a video message in which she stressed the importance of promoting human rights education and democratic citizenship. Highlighting challenges to human rights in contemporary European society, the Commissioner stressed that education is key in addressing these challenges, protecting our individual liberties, and contributing to pluralist societies.

National Human Rights Structures

In the course of this quarter, the Commissioner held several bilateral meetings with heads of national human rights structures to discuss human rights issues of relevance in their respective countries (see below, Other Meetings).

In addition, on 31 May, following the dismissal of Ukraine's Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (ombudsperson) Lyudmyla Denisova by the Ukrainian Parliament in an urgent vote based on martial law, the Commissioner [stated](#) that the dismissal was in disregard of the relevant

international standards and weakened the institution at a critical time for human rights in Ukraine. She recalled that national human rights institutions performed essential work and called for their independence and effectiveness to be protected.

4. Other meetings

Meeting with His Holiness Pope Francis and Holy See officials

On 8 April the Commissioner [met](#) with His Holiness Pope Francis during a private audience held in Vatican City. The Commissioner highlighted her main concerns relating to the erosion in the protection of the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Europe and to the need to strengthen the response to the humanitarian and human rights consequences of the war in Ukraine.

The Commissioner also met with the Holy See Secretary of State, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and the Prefect ad interim of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny. Discussions focused on the need to improve the protection of migrants in Europe and humanitarian assistance to people internally displaced by the war in Ukraine or fleeing abroad, as well as on the need to strengthen human rights education and intercultural dialogue to prevent tensions, in particular in the Balkans.

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

On 19 April, the Commissioner held a meeting in Strasbourg with Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, during which they discussed on-going and future co-operation between her Office and the Georgian authorities following her visit to the country in February 2022.

Meeting with the Ombuds of Bulgaria

On 27 April, the Commissioner had a meeting in Strasbourg with the Ombuds of Bulgaria, Diana Kovatcheva. Issues discussed included the protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence, gender equality, the protection of the human rights of the child and of persons with disabilities, including in situations of crisis, and the functioning of the Ombudsman institution in Bulgaria.

Meeting with the Secretary of State for the European Union in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain

On 28 April, the Commissioner met with Pascual Ignacio Navarro Rios, Secretary of State for the European Union in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain. They discussed issues of common interest including developments concerning the human rights situation in Europe.

Meeting with the National Ombuds of the Netherlands

On 29 April, the Commissioner met with the National Ombuds of the Netherlands, Reinier van Zutphen. They exchanged on a range of issues concerning the Netherlands specifically, such as artificial intelligence and access to welfare, ethnic profiling and policing, and transparency of

governance. They also discussed wider European issues, such as in relation to asylum and migration, as well as the role of Ombudsman institutions in protecting human rights.

Meeting with the Executive Director of Open Society Justice Initiative

On 29 April, the Commissioner met with James Goldston, Executive Director of Open Society Justice Initiative, in Strasbourg. They discussed various human rights issues, with a focus on the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Meeting with EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity

On 7 June, the Commissioner held a meeting with Stella Ronner-Grubačić, Ambassador for Gender and Diversity at the European External Action Service, during which they discussed the need to address conflict-related sexual violence and the importance of combating gender-based violence against women and promoting diversity across Europe.

Meeting with the President of the National Assembly of Armenia

On 9 June, the Commissioner met with Alen Simonyan, President of the National Assembly of Armenia, and discussed her recent work on the human rights situation in the country as well as recent developments in Armenia in this field.

Meeting with the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the UK Parliament

On 14 June, the Commissioner met with the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) of the UK Parliament. They exchanged views on the recently introduced Bill of Rights Bill, which would repeal and replace the Human Rights Act 1998. They also discussed issues around the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, including in view of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, as well as other recent developments in relation to human rights in the UK, particularly in the areas of policing and of asylum and migration.

Meeting with the Prime Minister of Iceland

On 20 June, the Commissioner met with Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland, in Strasbourg. They discussed current human rights challenges, both in general and in the context of the upcoming Icelandic presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

Meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence of Ireland

On 21 June, the Commissioner met with Simon Coveney, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence of Ireland in Strasbourg. They discussed issues of common interest, focusing on several human rights challenges facing Europe, both in general and in the context of the current Irish presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

Meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

On 21 June, the Commissioner met with Pekka Haavisto, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, in Strasbourg. They discussed various human rights issues of common interest.

Meeting with the President of the Hellenic Republic

On 22 June, the Commissioner met with Katerina Sakellaropoulou, President of the Hellenic Republic, in Strasbourg. They discussed various human rights issues, including those pertaining to the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Meeting with His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands

On 23 June, the Commissioner met His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands in the context of his working visit to the Council of Europe. His Majesty was accompanied by the Minister for Legal Protection, Franc Weerwind. They exchanged on various recent general developments in Europe affecting human rights, as well as specific topics of mutual interest.

Fifth Annual Conference of the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research

On 23 June, the Commissioner delivered an online keynote speech during the [Fifth Annual Conference of the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research on “human rights in \(times of\) crisis”](#). In her speech, the Commissioner touched upon the lessons learnt from past human rights crises and referred to her recommendations on how to address new human rights crises resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and to prevent or mitigate human rights violations stemming from any future crisis.

Alliance for Peacebuilding podcast on sexual violence in conflict

On 28 June, the Alliance for Peacebuilding published [Episode 12](#) of its podcast series on “Ending the Silence: How the International Community can Prevent and Bring Accountability for Sexual Violence in Conflict” featuring the Commissioner for Human Rights along with other guest speakers including the Prosecutor General of Ukraine and the Co-Founder of Rally For Her Justice. The Commissioner stressed the importance of training all those involved in ensuring justice for victims of conflict-related sexual violence; adopting a victim-centred approach; properly identifying victims of sexual violence; facilitating their access to justice; and helping them access redress for the harm suffered.

5. Human Rights Defenders

During the second quarter of 2022, the Commissioner continued to support human rights defenders and civil society in the Council of Europe area in various forms, including by meeting them, cooperating with international partners and raising relevant issues in her dialogue with member states. Particular attention was paid to the situation of human rights defenders in Ukraine in the context of the ongoing war and those in the Russian Federation and Belarus in the context of the crackdown on human rights there.

On 13 April, the Commissioner held an online meeting with Russian human rights defenders as a follow-up to her [statement](#) on the need to support them after the cessation of the membership of the Russian Federation in the Council of Europe. The meeting allowed the Commissioner to receive first-hand information about the situation of Russian civil society and discuss possible ways of supporting and engaging with them in the context of the unprecedented crackdown on human rights in Russia.

On 14 April, the Commissioner held an online meeting with Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, exchanging information on recent activities and exploring possible ways of cooperation. They addressed, among others, the safety of human rights defenders in Ukraine in the context of the war and reprisals against civil society in Russia and Belarus in the context of the human rights crises there.

On 22 April, the Commissioner held an online meeting with several Ukrainian human rights defenders as part of her response to the human rights consequences of the war in Ukraine. The meeting allowed the Commissioner to receive updated information about patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law as a result of the war and to discuss issues related to the safety and working environment of human rights defenders operating there.

Following up on previous [statements](#) on the pattern of persecution targeting Crimean Tatar human rights defenders, activists, leaders, and journalists, as well as many ordinary members of this group, on 22 April, the Commissioner [observed](#) that the trial of the leader of Crimean Tatars, Mustafa Dzhemilev, in Crimea, conducted on spurious charges and in absentia and followed by a conviction assorted with an “amnesty”, was an example of this pattern.

On 13 June, the Commissioner held an online meeting with women’s human rights defenders from Türkiye. The meeting gave the Commissioner an opportunity to obtain information about the most recent developments concerning women’s human rights, including concerning violence against women, as well as the many challenges that women human rights defenders from Türkiye face in carrying out their work.

6. System of the European Convention on Human Rights

Submission in Osman Kavala v. Türkiye infringement proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights

On 14 April, the Commissioner published her [written observations](#) in the infringement proceedings before the Court in the case of Osman Kavala v. Türkiye relating to the question referred to the Court by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers as to whether Türkiye had failed to implement the judgment in this case. The case concerns the arrest and detention of a civil society activist and human rights defender in Türkiye, as well as the allegation that this detention was used for purposes other than those prescribed in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Based on her extensive work in this context, in particular her [third party intervention](#) of 20 December 2018 before the Court in this case and the [submission](#) to the Committee of Ministers in the context of the Committee’s supervision of the execution of the judgement, the written comments provide the Commissioner’s observations on the implementation by Türkiye of individual measures relating to the applicant’s detention. They also address the broader legal and political context prevailing in Türkiye, which the Commissioner finds crucially important for assessing whether Türkiye had acted in good faith and in a manner compatible with the “conclusions and spirit” of the judgment. Having considered the ongoing detention on remand of the applicant and the pursuit of criminal proceedings against him as a seamless extension and continuation of the

violations found in the Court's judgement, the Commissioner concludes that by not releasing the applicant from detention, the authorities failed to abide by the Court's judgement.

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

On 24 June, the Commissioner delivered a keynote [speech](#) at the European Court of Human Rights' solemn hearing for the opening of the judicial year. In her speech entitled "At the crossroads – Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law", the Commissioner praised the efforts made by the Court to adapt to major challenges, by adopting a dynamic and evolutive interpretation of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, opening the courtroom to *amici curiae*, including the Commissioner, and developing tools that have a clear immediate impact on applicants' rights and lives, such as the interim measures. Deploring the attacks on the Convention system in some European countries, the non-implementation of key judgments of the Court and the failure of some states to address the structural problems depriving people of their Convention rights, the Commissioner called on Council of Europe member states to recommit to the values and norms of the Organisation.

7. Communication and information work

The Commissioner's work generated almost 200 news items from different national and international news outlets. The main topics covered by the media were migration, media freedom and the human rights of LGBTI people.

The work on migration was covered by many media, including *The Associated Press*, *AFP*, *Le Figaro*, *La Tribune de Genève*, *Agencia Lusa*, *ARD Tagesschau*, *DPA*, *Deutsche Welle*, *EFE*, *N-TV*, *Rdattoresociale.it*, *Telex.hu*, *Vatican News*, *Agence Europe*, *ANSA*, *Avvenire*, *El Pais*, *Presenza*, *Euractiv*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *The Times*, *ORF*, *Volksblatt*, *ERT*, *Politico*, *Index.hu*, and *MTI*.

On media freedom, the Commissioner's work was reported, among many others, by *The Guardian*, *Avvenire*, *EFE*, *Deutsche Welle*, *SwissInfo*, *SIR*, *Ukrinform*, *A1 ON*, *MIA*, *Agence Europe*, *ANP*, *ANSA*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *KNA*, *Euractiv*, *The Independent*, *The Irish Examiner*, *Kommersant*, *La Repubblica*, *The Telegraph Online*, *Mail on Sunday*, *To Vima*, and *Agenzia Giornalistica Italia*.

A large number of media reported on the Commissioner's work on the rights of LGBTI people, including *AFP*, *Askaneews*, *Hina*, *Index.hr*, *Jutarnji List*, *The Huffington Post*, *France 24*, *La Libre Belgique*, *Le Matin*, *SDA/ATS*, *TV5 Monde*, *Agencia Lusa*, *DN.pt*, *O Globo*, *BBC*, *Danas*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Deutsche Welle*, *EFE*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, *La Croix*, *N1 Info*, *STA*, and *Radio Free Europe*.

AFP, *ARD Tagesschau*, *BBC*, *Der Spiegel*, *DPA*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *EFE*, *France 24*, *Kyiv Post*, *La Libre Belgique*, *N1 Info*, *Novinite*, *The Washington Post*, *Ukrinform*, *Agence Europe*, *Al Jazeera Balkans*, *ERT*, *Hina*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Radio Sarajevo*, *Evropeiskaya Pravda*, *New York Daily News*, *Die Weltwoche*, *Europa Press*, *Europe1*, *Le Parisien*, *Ouest France*, *RTBF*, and *TF1 Info*, covered the Commissioner's work in relation to the war in Ukraine. The Commissioner also gave an interview to *CNN* on this topic.

The Commissioner's work on freedom of assembly was covered by several media, including *STA*, *Delo*, *Dnevni Avaz*, *N1 Info*, *Radio Sarajevo*, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, *Balkan Insight*, *The Shift News*, *El Nacional*, and *Agence Europe*.

The Associated Press, Vijesti, Times of Malta, Die Presse, Deutsche Welle, 24 Chasa, Devnik.bg, Sega, ABC News, El Mundo, Euronews, and The Guardian were among those who covered the Commissioner's work on women's rights.

Additional coverage concerned children's rights (*Anadolou Agency, BNR, Dariknews.bg, Trud.bg, BTA, ERT, FENA, N1 Info, Sarajevo Times*), racism (*La Croix*), the meeting with the Pope (*Vatican News*), Roma (*Romea.cz*), and transitional justice (*Politico, ArmenPress*)

46 tweets were published, generating almost 785000 impressions in total and an engagement rate of 2.6% and boosting the number of followers by 1957 (an increase of 3,1% compared to the previous trimester). On Facebook, 41 posts reached 44946 people and garnered 320 new subscribers (up +4,1% compared to the previous trimester).

Almost 120 000 unique visitors consulted the Commissioner's website, an increase of more than 40% compared to the same quarter of 2021 and of 10% to the previous quarter of 2022.