

# COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

3<sup>RD</sup> PERIODIC ACTIVITY REPORT 2025

1 September to 31 December

Presented to the Committee of Ministers  
and the Parliamentary Assembly

This report contains a summary of the activities carried out by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O’Flaherty, between 1 September and 31 December 2025.

## 1. Country focus

### 1.1 Visits and missions

#### *Visit to Germany*

The Commissioner carried out a [visit](#) to Germany from 13 to 17 October. The visit focused on issues related to migration and asylum and on freedom of peaceful assembly and expression in the context of protests in relation to the war in Gaza. He also addressed concerns regarding racism and discrimination, in particular antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Federal Minister of the Interior, Alexander Dobrindt; the Federal Minister of Justice and Consumer Protection, Dr Stefanie Hubig; members of the German delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE); the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid, Prof. Dr Lars Castellucci; the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, Dr Felix Klein; the Vice-President of the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, Katrin Hirsland; the Independent Federal Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Ferda Ataman; the Vice President of the Berlin Police, Marco Langner; and the Head of the Berlin State Police Directorate, Roman Seifert. He also met with the German Institute of Human Rights, UNHCR Germany, the Secretariat of International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and held extensive discussions with civil society on the issues of focus during the visit.

Concerning migration and asylum, discussions focused on the steps taken by the authorities to implement the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. With the draft legislation to transpose the Pact into domestic law before the parliament, the Commissioner underlined the importance of including clear provisions for independent human rights monitoring in connection with screening and asylum border procedures directly in the law. He further observed that the experiences of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and the German Institute for Human Rights should be built upon when creating monitoring mechanisms. The Commissioner noted the importance of the draft law in ensuring that asylum seekers can benefit from all necessary procedural safeguards, and that both asylum seekers and those faced with return are housed in appropriate reception facilities. Repeated concerns were raised during the visit regarding asylum seekers being refused entry into Germany by federal border police, without an individual asylum procedure, and with little or no assessment of individual vulnerabilities.

The Commissioner raised concerns about the significant increase in antisemitism in Germany and across Europe, reiterating the importance of effectively tackling antisemitism using multiple tools. However, in Germany as elsewhere, the distinction between what constitutes legitimate criticism of Israel and what constitutes antisemitic hate speech has become increasingly blurred, including due to a misapplication of the working definition of antisemitism of the IHRA, leading to undue restrictions of the right to freedom of expression. The Commissioner considered that the increased attention given to policing and criminal law must continue to be matched by an ever-strengthened focus on fostering dialogue, and long-term support of and investment in awareness-raising, Holocaust remembrance and educational initiatives. He

was also concerned about the surge in anti-Muslim hatred in Germany in recent years and urged the authorities to address this phenomenon effectively.

Following up on his [letter](#) to the German authorities of 6 June, the Commissioner raised the issue of restrictions to various forms of protest and reports of excessive use of force by law enforcement officers during protests, in the context of the war in Gaza, including in Berlin. He noted that force should only be used as a last resort, when all other means have been exhausted and strictly only when necessary and proportionate to the legitimate objective, in line with the principles of precaution, non-discrimination and accountability.

The Commissioner's Memorandum following the visit is forthcoming.

### *Visit to Türkiye*

The Commissioner conducted a [visit](#) to Türkiye from 1 to 5 December, during which he discussed the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and aspects of the administration of justice. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Minister for Family and Social Services, Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Kemal Bozay; the Deputy Minister of Justice, Niyazi Acar; the Deputy Minister of Interior, Münir Karaloğlu; the President of the Constitutional Court, Kadir Özkaya; and members of the delegation of Türkiye to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He also met with the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK); the Union of Turkish Bar Associations; the Istanbul Bar Association; and held extensive discussions with civil society and youth on the issues of focus during the visit.

The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to make full use of the ongoing "Terror-Free Türkiye Initiative" process to advance reforms and strengthen human rights protections, by bringing counter-terrorism and other legislation and its implementation in line with human rights standards. Following up on his [statement](#) of 24 March, the Commissioner remained concerned about bans on assemblies and the excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators, recalling that any restrictions on peaceful assembly must meet the tests of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination.

On freedom of expression, the Commissioner observed that the broad use of a number of criminal provisions raises questions of compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). He referred to several longstanding groups of cases concerning freedom of expression such as the *Öner and Türk*, *Altuğ Taner Akçam*, *Artun and Güvener*, *Işıkırık*, and *Nedim Şener* groups where general measures remain pending execution before the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. He pointed to ongoing concerns regarding online freedom of expression, including the extensive use of access blocking and content removal measures, contrary to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The Commissioner also examined restrictions to the work of civil society organisations, including disproportionate financial and administrative sanctions, and scrutiny under Law No. 5253 and Law No. 7262. He emphasised that civil society organisations play an essential role in safeguarding human rights and civic space and that any restrictions on their work must be ECHR compliant.

Expressing concerns about pressures faced by bar associations and members of the legal profession, including the ongoing criminal proceedings against the President and Executive Board of the Istanbul Bar Association, the Commissioner encouraged Türkiye to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention

on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, and underlined the importance of implementing safeguards for the independence, safety and autonomy of lawyers.

While Türkiye maintains a generally high execution rate for the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights against Türkiye, the Commissioner noted a low level of implementation of leading judgments and raised concerns about the lack of progress in the cases of *Osman Kavala*, *Selahattin Demirtaş (no.2)* and *Yüksekdağ Şenoğlu and Others*. He also noted that the refusal of lower courts to implement some key Constitutional Court decisions undermined the rule of law and the principle of legal certainty.

The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to pursue a reform of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye with a view to securing A-status accreditation in full compliance with the Paris Principles ('Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions').

The Commissioner's Memorandum following the visit is forthcoming.

## 1.2 Memoranda, letters and statements

### *Social media post on the acquittal of activists providing humanitarian assistance on the border in Poland*

On 9 September, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) the acquittal by a Polish court of five human rights defenders who provided humanitarian aid to migrants on the Poland-Belarus border. He reiterated his call on authorities to never criminalise humanitarian action.

### *Statement on proposed constitutional amendments by the Parliament of Slovakia*

On 24 September, the Commissioner [urged](#) Slovak Parliamentarians not to adopt amendments to the Constitution. As set out in his June [statement](#), he reiterated that the proposal that the Slovak Republic retains sovereignty in matters falling within the notion of 'national identity' conflicts with the obligation under the ECHR to give full effect to the rights and freedoms defined in that instrument, and that it could undermine the rights of specific groups.

### *Letter to Secretary of State for the Home Department of the United Kingdom on policing of protests*

On 14 October, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, on the regulation of protests. He asked the government to ensure that counter-terrorism legislation does not unnecessarily restrict freedom of peaceful assembly. He recommended a comprehensive review of the overall legal framework on protests to ensure its full compliance with the United Kingdom's international human rights obligations. The Commissioner encouraged the authorities to reconsider certain protest-related provisions in the Crime and Policing Bill currently before the House of Lords, specifically the proposed new offence of concealing one's identity, as well as restrictions on assemblies in the vicinity of places of worship.

The reply of the Home Secretary of United Kingdom is available on the Commissioner's website.

*Letter to the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom on the situation of trans people*

In a [letter](#) addressed to the Lord Alton of Liverpool, Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the UK Parliament and to Sarah Owen MP, Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee of the House of Commons published on 14 October, the Commissioner shared observations on human rights standards that must be upheld in further steps following the UK Supreme Court's judgment in *For Women Scotland*. He set out key elements of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights that should be taken into consideration in this process. The Commissioner warned against measures that could exclude trans people from many areas of life. He also cautioned against tendencies to view the human rights of different groups as a zero-sum game, noting that this approach builds on prejudice against trans people.

*Letter to President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria on proposed amendments to the Child Protection Act and other laws*

On 22 October, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, Nataliya Kiselova, asking parliamentarians to refrain from adopting proposed amendments to the Child Protection Act and other laws, expressing concern about their compatibility with Council of Europe and other international human rights standards. The bill sought to ban exposing children to "content that does not correspond to the understanding of gender as a biological category" and to criminalise trans-specific healthcare for minors. The Commissioner cautioned that these measures could lead to disproportionate restrictions on the rights to education, freedom of expression and assembly, and the right to health without discrimination, including on grounds of gender identity. He also noted that such measures may reinforce stigma and prejudice against LGBTI people. He reiterated that legislative bans on disseminating information about LGBTI people among children are harmful and incompatible with the notions of equality, pluralism and tolerance.

*Social media post on proposal before the Parliament of Latvia to withdraw from Istanbul Convention*

On 23 October, the Commissioner [noted](#) the Latvian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee's decision to advance a proposal to the Saeima to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and called on parliamentarians to disregard disinformation and consider the hard-gained protection from gender-based violence for women and girls and the comprehensive framework the Istanbul Convention offers to safeguard women's rights.

*Letter to the Prosecutor General of Georgia on investigations into the conduct of law enforcement*

On 10 December, the Commissioner [published](#) a letter addressed to the Prosecutor General of Georgia, Giorgi Gvarakidze, about the lack of tangible progress in the criminal investigations into the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement and groups of unidentified masked men against protesters and journalists in November and December 2024. The Commissioner raised concern about the effectiveness of the investigations initiated by the Special Investigative Service and transferred to the Prosecutor's Office. While criminal proceedings against protesters have advanced and led to convictions, there has been no accountability for alleged police abuses. He referred to findings by Georgia's Public Defender, documenting numerous allegations of ill-treatment of protesters, including reports of torture and alleged threats of sexual violence against women protesters. The Commissioner stressed that the use of water cannons containing chemical irritants should be fully examined, as it raises serious questions

about the legality, necessity and proportionality of the use of force, especially considering official acknowledgements that chemicals were mixed into water cannons during protests. Recalling the European Court of Human Rights' case-law on Georgia, he urged prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations, calling for accountability for any human rights violations committed against protesters, and requested updated information on the measures taken.

The reply of the Georgian authorities is available on the Commissioner's website.

### 1.3 Meetings with authorities

#### *Meeting with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Children and Families of Norway*

On 15 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with Kjetil Skeide Edvardsen, State Secretary at the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, in Strasbourg. They discussed issues pertaining to children's rights and young people's participation in democracy and society.

#### *Meeting with the Minister of Justice of Norway*

On 19 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with the Minister of Justice of Norway, Astri Aas-Hansen, in the margins of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers for Justice on "Cross-Border Cooperation and Mutual Assistance: The Strengthening of Cooperation to Counter Transnational Crimes" held in Valletta. They discussed human rights challenges in migration and the importance of safeguarding the system of the European Convention on Human Rights.

#### *Meeting with the Prime Minister of Armenia*

On 30 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia, in Strasbourg. They discussed the protection of human rights in Armenia, in view of the forthcoming Commissioner's visit to the country.

#### *Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria*

On 2 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Atanas Zafirov, Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria, in the margins of the 18<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion in Brussels. They discussed the human rights situation of Roma communities in Bulgaria, in particular in the area of access to adequate housing.

#### *Meeting with the Czech Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs*

On 2 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Lucie Fuková, Czech Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs, in the margins of the 18<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion in Brussels. They discussed the situation of Roma women survivors of forced sterilisation and the antigypsyism facing Roma communities, including in healthcare settings.

*Meeting with the Human Rights Ambassador of Finland*

On 6 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Katja Pehrman, Human Rights Ambassador of Finland, in the margins of the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference 2025. They exchanged on common priorities.

*Meeting with Head of the Human Rights Department of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom*

On 6 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Tom Woodroffe, Head of the Human Rights Department at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, in the margins of the Warsaw OSCE ODIHR Human Dimension Conference 2025. They exchanged on current human rights challenges to the system of the ECHR.

*Meeting with the Minister for Social Security of Finland*

On 7 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, Minister of Social Security of Finland, in the margins of the meeting of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI in Hämeenlinna, Finland. They exchanged on the human rights challenges faced by women and girls, including those in the Roma and Traveller communities.

*Meeting with the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers*

On 7 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers in Hämeenlinna, Finland. They discussed areas of mutual concern and explored future cooperation.

*Meeting with the Minister of Education, Science and Innovation of Portugal*

On 11 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with the Minister of Education, Science and Innovation of Portugal, Fernando Alexandre, in the margins of the Lisbon Web Summit. They discussed the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) literacy in schools, child protection, and other topics of mutual interest.

*Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland*

On 17 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Radosław Sikorski, in the margins of the Warsaw Seminar for Human Rights. They discussed migration and human rights, as well as the human rights situation in relation to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

*Meeting with members of the Government of Scotland*

On 26 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and Kaukab Stewart MSP, Minister for Equalities of the Government of Scotland online as follow up to the Commissioner's [visit](#) to the United Kingdom in July. They discussed human rights-based approaches to tackling child poverty, the incorporation of international human rights treaties, and issues related to the ECHR.

### *Meeting with Denmark Ambassador for Conventions*

On 26 November, the Commissioner met with Denmark's Ambassador for Conventions, Nicolaj Hejberg Petersen, in Strasbourg. They exchanged views on the system of the ECHR, particularly in the context of migration.

### *Meeting with the Secretary for relations with States and international organisations of the Holy See*

On 16 December, the Commissioner [met](#) with the Secretary for relations with States and international organisations of the Holy See, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, in Rome. They discussed pathways to people-centred peace for Ukraine, migration, Roma and Travellers rights, AI and the need to uphold the universality of human rights.

## 2. Thematic focus

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

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

On 13-14 November, the Commissioner convened a high-level, [closed-door meeting](#) in Warsaw, focused on charting human rights centred pathways to peace and recovery in Ukraine. The meeting brought together 35 senior officials and experts from governments, international organisations, and civil society. The discussions built on ten core human rights elements for achieving a just, lasting, and effective peace, that fully respects human dignity, as outlined in the Commissioner's July [Memorandum on human rights elements for peace in Ukraine](#).

On 11 December, the Commissioner published a [report](#) summarising the key conclusions from the meeting. The report emphasised the need to secure a people-centred peace by prioritising the rights of those most affected, including victims, refugees, internally displaced persons, prisoners of war, civilian detainees, unlawfully transferred Ukrainian children and people living in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia. This includes the release of all prisoners of war and all civilian detainees, and the unconditional return of all unlawfully transferred Ukrainian children. There should be meaningful inclusion of women and a gender perspective at all stages of the peace process. In addition, international and national actors (including victim and other civil society organisations) should play a vital role in peace and recovery. Pursuing accountability through multiple avenues and fair reparations for all victims of Russia's war of aggression (since 2014) must form a central part of any peace and are essential to a sustainable reconstruction and recovery. The report raised concerns about the 1,6 million children living in occupied territories who are subject to a militarised education system designed to forcibly alter their national identity. It also drew attention to the lack of access for international humanitarian and human rights organisations to Ukrainian prisoners of war held by Russia, the overwhelming majority of whom are believed to have been tortured. Furthermore, to ensure a sustainable, human rights based, victim-centred recovery, Ukraine's human rights commitments within the EU accession process must be integrated with reconstruction and peace efforts.

On 24 November, in the context of diplomatic efforts intensifying around the world to lay foundations for peace in Ukraine, the Commissioner [reiterated](#) that a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace can only be achieved if it is anchored in human rights.

On 30 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with Ukrainian journalists Dmytro Khyliuk and Vladyslav Yesypenko who spoke of their own and their colleagues' arrests and torture in Russian detention. Their stories highlighted the urgent need to secure the release of all Ukrainians illegally held by Russia.

On 4 December, the Commissioner published an opinion [article](#) jointly with Oleksandra Matviichuk, Chair of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Center for Civil Liberties from Ukraine, in which they warned that diplomatic efforts to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine must not be merely transactional. They stressed that any peace must be anchored in human rights and international law, with justice, accountability, and protection for the most vulnerable at its core. They cautioned that a settlement focused on territories and military capacity, ignoring criminal accountability, or neglecting the needs of displaced people and populations in temporarily occupied territories would be unjust, unsustainable, and set a dangerous precedent for the future of international law.

On 10 December, the Commissioner delivered a video message to the annual conference in Kyiv organised by the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights. He expressed deep appreciation for the tireless work of the Parliamentary Commissioner to protect human rights amid the ongoing Russian aggression. He emphasised the critical importance of the Ombuds' work during the war and called for more resources to support the institution. He noted its ever-increasing workload and the impediments to its work caused by the war. The Commissioner also emphasised that human rights must remain at the core of any pathway to peace and reaffirmed his unwavering solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

On the same day, in a [video message](#) marking Human Rights Day 2025, the Commissioner expressed grave concern over the current risks facing the future of the global human rights protection system and underlined that the most urgent task in Europe is supporting a free and thriving Ukraine. He called for the provision of comprehensive human rights support to the country during this consequential year. The Commissioner also emphasised that human dignity and human rights must remain at the core of any emerging pathway to peace for Ukraine.

Throughout the period under review, the Commissioner continued to react to Russia's deadly attacks on civilians in Ukraine. On 9 September, he [reacted](#) to an attack in Yarova, deploring the war's terrible impact on people living near the frontline, especially older persons, and expressing solidarity with the families. On 19 November, the Commissioner [reacted](#) to attacks in Ternopil, calling for accountability and redress for the victims.

## 2.2 Human rights of Roma and Travellers

On 30 September, the Commissioner addressed the human rights situation of Roma and Travellers in Europe during an [exchange](#) with the PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and in a [meeting](#) with Georgios Stamatis, PACE General Rapporteur on Roma and Travellers.

On 1 October, during the PACE session, the Commissioner launched his book [The Unheard 12 Million](#), published by the Council of Europe, along with an accompanying [photo exhibition](#), curated by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN). This first-person account is a call for European

decision makers to act decisively to improve the lived experience and secure the human rights of the 10-12 million Roma and Travellers across the continent. It tells the compelling stories of those at the forefront, particularly Roma and Traveller women and girls, fighting for their own rights and for those of others pushed to the margins of society. While addressing Europe as a whole, the book specifically features experiences from Finland, Greece, Ireland, North Macedonia, and Slovakia. The photo exhibition will tour key European cities following its first hosting by the ERIAC Gallery Space in Berlin. On that occasion, the Commissioner had an [exchange](#) with representatives of Roma and Sinti Women and Youth organisations from Germany.

On 2 October, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the 18<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion (EPRI) in Brussels where he stressed the need to confront widespread racism and discrimination, to listen to and work with Roma and Travellers, to support the empowerment of women as agents of change and improve the deplorable living conditions faced by many Roma and Travellers across Europe. In the margins of the event, the Commissioner also [met](#) with the European Roma Rights Centre and the Fundación Secretariado Gitano to discuss the human rights situation of Roma communities across Europe and the essential work carried out by Roma-led NGOs.

On 5 November, the Commissioner [marked](#) International Romani Language Day, reiterating that Romani language is central to Roma identity and culture and it is often kept alive through the voices of Roma women.

On 18 November, the Commissioner had an [exchange of views](#) with the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI). He encouraged CDADI to strengthen its efforts on advancing the protection of the human rights of Roma and Travellers, and shared the activities conducted in this area, including his findings and recommendations presented in the five Memoranda on the human rights of the communities following his visits to Finland, Greece, Ireland, North Macedonia, and Slovakia, and his book *The Unheard 12 Million*. The Commissioner spoke about challenges in the areas of housing, inclusive and quality education, and participation in public and political life. He reiterated the importance of history teaching, memorialisation initiatives and of the preservation and celebration of Roma and Traveller arts and cultures in combating antigypsyism.

On 29 November, the Commissioner and the PACE General Rapporteur on Roma and Travellers, Georgios Stamatis, jointly [took part](#) in the 16 Days of Activism campaign marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. They highlighted Roma women's fight for justice and redress for forced sterilisation and drew attention to continuing abuses and intersectional discrimination faced by Roma and Traveller women and girls in healthcare. They reiterated their support for survivors and urged all member states to deliver justice, provide reparation, and guarantee equal care.

On 12 December, the Commissioner [spoke](#) at an event jointly organised by the Department of Applied Social Studies of Maynooth University and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day. The event celebrated 40 years of collaboration between the two hosts in the field of social justice, community development and human rights advocacy for Roma and Travellers in Ireland and presented the John O'Connell Award.

The Commissioner's work in this area also included meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria and Czech Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs (see *Country focus*).

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

During the reporting period, the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants were the subject of country-specific work, notably in Germany and Poland (see *Country focus*).

In addition, on 4 September, the Commissioner published a [report](#) on *Externalised asylum and migration policies and human rights law*, providing an overview of the challenges that come with transferring asylum, return and border control functions to other countries. He underlined that external co-operation on asylum and migration needs to be designed and implemented with great care, so as not to put human rights at risk. Governments developing externalisation policies in this field should carefully assess their potential negative impact on human rights, as such policies can expose women, men and children to significant risks of serious harm and protracted suffering. In the absence of adequate human rights preconditions and safeguards, externalisation policies might result in people being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, collective expulsions and arbitrary detention or may put their lives in danger. Such policies might also hinder effective access to asylum and deprive individuals of legal remedies. The document identifies three areas in which risks are particularly acute: external processing of asylum claims; external return procedures, including through so-called “return hubs”; and the outsourcing of border control to other countries, some of which have a documented history of serious violations against people on the move.

The Commissioner made four main recommendations to Council of Europe member states, acting individually or collectively, including in the context of membership of the EU. First, adopt a precautionary approach by carrying out comprehensive human rights risk assessments, developing adequate risk mitigation strategies before engaging in external co-operation, and reviewing ongoing activities for their human rights impact. Second, define clear and non-negotiable principles that exclude any cooperation likely to put people at risk of human rights violations, and ensure that children and other vulnerable people are never subjected to externalised procedures. Third, ensure adequate human rights preconditions and safeguards, adapted to each model of co-operation, including preventing the shifting of responsibility to other countries, ensuring no one is transferred to a partner country without a rigorous individual assessment, and limiting any use of return hubs to specific, clearly defined situations. Fourth, strengthen transparency, monitoring and accountability, through robust agreements, transparent information-sharing, independent monitoring, and effective investigations of any alleged violations. The Commissioner reiterated that as European states continue to pursue externalisation, they should assess the risks involved, commit to strong legal guarantees, and ensure scrutiny of their actions. This is crucial for their policies to be in line with their legal obligations to uphold human rights at home and internationally.

On 21 October, the Commissioner addressed the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on the smuggling of migrants and meeting of the Network of Prosecutors organised by the Council of Europe’s Committee on Crime Problems in Strasbourg. Speaking via video message, he urged participants to not forget human rights considerations in their deliberations, reiterating that the criminalisation of humanitarian activity is an inappropriate means to combat smuggling. The Commissioner called on states to deal with issues of migration via safe and legal pathways.

On 23 October, the Commissioner participated, by means of a [video message](#), in the launch of a new report on externalisation by Gehad Madi, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. He

welcomed the report as a key tool to protect human rights, and committed to working in complementarity with the Special Rapporteur on this issue.

On 17 November, the Commissioner delivered the [keynote speech](#) at the 16<sup>th</sup> Warsaw Human Rights Seminar on “Human Rights and the Legal and Geopolitical Contexts of Migration and Asylum” organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. The Commissioner underlined the key role the European Convention on Human Rights has in shaping human rights law and its transformative impact on European society. He highlighted how the European Court of Human Rights has helped safeguard democracy, the rule of law, and human dignity. He stressed that the European human rights architecture is a roadmap for navigating volatile times and urged against weakening human rights protections, particularly in response to migration issues and populism, stressing the importance of defending universal human rights for all, especially the most vulnerable.

On 20 November, the Commissioner met with the EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, Magnus Brunner. They exchanged on a range of issues related to migration, including externalisation and returns. He also had an exchange with the Head of Cabinet to the EU Commissioner for the Mediterranean, in particular about the Commissioner’s recent report on externalisation and the European Commission’s Pact for the Mediterranean.

On 26 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with member of the European Parliament Malik Azmani, rapporteur on proposed Return Regulation for the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), to discuss human rights safeguards in proposed EU migrant return legislation.

On 2 December, the Commissioner supported the [call](#) of UN experts on the European Parliament and European Council to ensure the new EU Facilitation Directive does not lead to the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants. He joined Siobhán Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Gehad Madi, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Cecilia M. Bailliet, UN Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, in their appeal.

On 18 November, in his [exchange of views](#) with the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies, the Commissioner presented general observations in response to the questioning by certain member states of the law and practice of the ECHR and the Court concerning migration management. He emphasised the importance of evidence-based arguments in challenging misleading claims, such as the association of irregular migrants with crime. The Commissioner stressed that national security is best achieved by upholding human rights and the rule of law. He highlighted misconceptions about migration law and asylum, urging respect for the right to seek asylum and the universality of human rights. The Commissioner further cautioned against weakening the independence of the European Court of Human Rights and warned that any erosion of protections could set dangerous precedents for other marginalised groups

On 10 December, the Commissioner reiterated these messages at the Informal Conference of Ministers for Justice of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (see *System of the European Convention on Human Rights*).

## 2.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human rights

On 20 October, the Commissioner issued his [Chair's Notes](#) following a consultation with experts on AI and human rights. They provide a new governance roadmap and warn that a lack of human-centric design poses a high risk to democracies and human rights. The consultation, held in May 2025, identified several urgent threats posed by AI. These include the erosion of human dignity and autonomy through “data cages” enabling in-depth profiling, the dangers of “agentic” AI in security contexts; and the long-term risk of exacerbated social isolation through companion chatbots. The report also warns that large language models are amplifying “careless speech”, which is subtly inaccurate information that degrades the entire informational ecosystem. While the current regulatory framework, anchored by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and the EU's AI Act, is robust, the Commissioner underlined that the immediate challenge is effective implementation with human responsibility and oversight over AI systems.

On 21 October, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the 15<sup>th</sup> Europol Data Protection Experts Network (EDEN) conference on “Data Protection & Cybersecurity in Law Enforcement” in Valletta. He highlighted the importance of maintaining commitment to human and regulatory oversight, strong institutions, and transparency in AI and law enforcement.

On 6-7 November, the Commissioner held a [consultation](#) with civil society representatives in Paris on embedding human rights in the governance of generative AI.

On 11 November, the Commissioner [spoke](#) at the Lisbon Web Summit on “Protecting human rights in the age of AI”. He discussed how emerging AI technologies are shaping human rights, reiterating that these must be designed and deployed with a human-centred approach – fostering innovation while explicitly protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The Commissioner emphasised that oversight is essential and called for efforts to promote digital literacy to counter manipulation.

During the November plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the Commissioner engaged with members of the European Parliament on AI regulation issues. On 26 November, he [met](#) with Michael McNamara and Brando Banifei, Co-Chairs of the European Parliament Working Group on the Implementation and Enforcement of the AI Act to discuss the European Commission's Digital Omnibus proposal to simplify the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.

On 15 December, the Commissioner delivered a [keynote speech](#) at the Parliamentary Conference on Artificial Intelligence organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Parliament of the United Kingdom, in London. He highlighted the need for smart oversight to protect human rights from the risks brought by AI technology.

## 2.5 Women's rights and gender equality

During the reporting period, women's rights and gender equality were central to the Commissioner's work in a number of areas, including the human rights of Roma and Traveller people and ensuring human rights centred pathways to peace and recovery in Ukraine.

Thus, in his [The Unheard 12 Million](#) book, the Commissioner paid particular attention to the lived experiences of Roma and Traveller women and girls, highlighting their role as agents of change in their

communities and beyond. Also, [taking part](#) in the 16 Days of Activism campaign for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Commissioner placed focus on intersectional discrimination in healthcare faced by Roma and Traveller women and girls and on the need to deliver justice and redress to Roma survivors of forced sterilisation (see *Thematic work: human rights of Roma and Travellers*). The Commissioner furthermore called for the meaningful inclusion of women and a gender perspective at all stages of the peace process in Ukraine (see *Thematic focus: Impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on human rights*).

The Commissioner reaction to the Latvian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee proposal to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention (see *Country focus*) is another aspect of the Commissioner's work in this thematic area.

## 2.6 Children's rights and rights of young people

On 16 November, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) the UK Government's scrapping of the two-child limit on welfare benefits for 2026, as one of the most effective actions to protect children's rights and lift them out of poverty.

On 17 November, the Commissioner held an online [exchange](#) with the Advisory Council on Youth on current human rights priorities, focusing on the increasing crackdown on young protesters and issues related to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. He confirmed his commitment to addressing the specific human rights issues of young people and to regular engagement with youth actors to properly understand their interests and the challenges they face.

On 10 December, the Commissioner addressed a video message to the 2025 Human Rights Education Forum organised at the European Youth Centre in Budapest to mark International Human Rights Day, and to enhance universal human rights education for, with and by young people.

## 2.7 Human rights of LGBTI people

During the reference period, activities in relation to the human rights of LGBTI people included interventions relating to their situation in Bulgaria and the United Kingdom (see *Country focus*).

On 7 October, the Commissioner held an [exchange](#) with the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI in Hämeenlinna, Finland. The exchange focused on the growing resistance to the human rights of LGBTI people. The Commissioner identified areas of concern and provided recommendations to states on how to respond.

On 23 October, the Commissioner delivered a [speech](#) at the ILGA-Europe Annual Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania. He reflected on the current challenges facing the human rights of LGBTI people, identifying key factors contributing to the worsening environment: identity politics that marginalise certain groups, especially trans and intersex people; the rise of populism, exploiting societal inequalities; the role of social media platforms in spreading anti-democratic and anti-human rights messages, including through AI; and the weakening of the political centre, which threatens democratic stability. The Commissioner called for increased support of LGBTI human rights defenders and civil society organisations, including through the

use of diplomatic, legal, and advocacy tools to support their human rights, challenging repressive laws within Council of Europe member states, and strong political leadership against hate and fear.

In the margins of the conference, the Commissioner [met](#) with human rights defenders and civil society, including Chaber, Executive Director of ILGA-Europe and Dan Christian Ghattas, Executive Director at OII Europe (Organisation Intersex International Europe).

On 27 October, at a high-level launch event organised under the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) the Committee of Ministers' [Recommendation](#) CM/Rec(2025)7 on equal rights for intersex persons, underlining its global significance and importance in providing a pathway towards better respect for human rights, while calling for awareness-raising and implementation.

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

On 17 September, the Commissioner took part in a [panel discussion](#) at the Council of Europe [High-level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation](#), organised in Valletta under the auspices of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. He highlighted that disinformation poses a threat to democracies and human rights as it distorts public debate, undermines trust in institutions, and fuels discrimination and violence, thereby weakening the very foundations of democratic governance and the rule of law. The Commissioner outlined the harmful impact of disinformation on individuals, society and institutions and the policy and regulatory responses needed in response.

## 2.9 Combating racism and intolerance

The Commissioner raised concerns about racism and discrimination during his visit to Germany with particular attention to antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred (see *Country focus*).

In addition, on 23 October, the Commissioner addressed, via video message, the [2025 Annual Seminar with Equality Bodies](#) "Advancing equality in an era of democratic backsliding" organised by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in cooperation with the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The Commissioner highlighted the complementarity of the work to combat racism and intolerance and build a world of equality, emphasising the need to stand in solidarity against pressure.

On 5 November, in the margins of the world Forum for Democracy, the Commissioner participated in the opening of the [El Holocausto tapestry exhibition](#). The tapestry depicts a mural completed in 1945 by Mexican artist Manuel Rodríguez Lozano as an artistic response to the horrors of the Holocaust and was commissioned and funded by Bill Shipsey, founder and executive director of [Art for Human Rights](#).

## 2.10 Other

On 16 September, following the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry finding that Israel has committed genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the Commissioner [reiterated](#) his call on Council of Europe member states to [refrain](#) from arms transfers that could lead to such atrocities and to prevent them and further human rights and humanitarian violations.

On 18 December, the Commissioner published a [Shout Out](#) entitled 'Refute the critics: human rights are Europe's greatest strategic asset'. He writes that geopolitical shifts challenge Europe's commitment to human rights, democracy and rule of law, but this commitment provides tangible resilience, fostering the mutual trust necessary for long-term security. Human rights provide the roadmap for navigating today's challenges. They should be at the heart of Europe's strategic repositioning, through action in three areas. First, reinforcing human rights in foreign and domestic policy, unlocking the full potential of Europe's soft power. This requires avoiding silence and double standards, investing in international human rights programmes and diplomacy, and a robust domestic rights agenda as the only effective counterpoint to the narrative of decline. Second, 'future-proofing' democratic institutions, which are the first under attack when illiberal actors come to power. Governments should conduct an urgent 'health check' of such institutions, before irreversible damage to them is done. Third, leaders need courage to speak up for our values. They should not imitate the language of those who seek to undermine rights and democratic norms. The 'civilisational decline' predicted by critics will not come from sticking to values and principles, but from abandoning them.

### 3. Human Rights Defenders

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

On 9 October, the Commissioner published a [Shout Out](#) on the crisis facing civil society and human rights defenders, expressing his concern at the rapidly deteriorating working conditions faced in Council of Europe member states. These are driven by three alarming trends: restrictive legislation, crackdowns and harassment and the funding crisis. Ostensibly aimed at increasing transparency or strengthening national sovereignty, restrictive laws stigmatise civil society activists and non-profits for receiving foreign funding. They introduce burdensome administrative rules, intrusive oversight, and excessive sanctions, making it difficult, and even dangerous, for human rights defenders to continue their vital work. The Commissioner observed a growing crackdown on activists, including in some cases through the excessive use of force by police against those who exercise their right to peaceful protest. The Commissioner stressed that too many human rights defenders are being prosecuted and even imprisoned for their legitimate work or for expressing dissenting or critical opinions. He further pointed out that the situation is exacerbated by the severe funding crisis that affects civil society organisations across Europe, following the significant cuts in aid by state and non-state funders at global level. The funding crisis is particularly damaging to human rights defenders and civil society organisations who have criticised government policies, exposed corruption or who defend the human rights of vulnerable groups. The Commissioner called for budget plans at regional and national levels to maintain adequate funding for human rights organisations.

### 4. National Human Rights Structures

On 9 September, the Commissioner [addressed](#) a conference held at the Bocconi University in Milan on "The role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in promoting rights and preventing rights-related litigation and mediating conflicts". He emphasised the key role of NHRIs in a country's human rights architecture and regretted the fact that certain member states, including Italy, still do not have an NHRI.

Referring to the national context, the Commissioner called on stakeholders to rally around one model that best fits the specificities of the country. He highlighted several criteria for the NHRI to be effective, including pluralism and inclusivity, a broad human rights mandate, independence and adequate funding.

On 23 October, the Commissioner addressed [ECRI's Annual Seminar with Equality Bodies](#) (see *Thematic focus: Combating racism and intolerance*).

On 20 November, the Commissioner [spoke](#) at European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) event on Strategic Partnerships, in Brussels. Looking at the current context for human rights, he suggested that we are in a period of profound transition and that the survival of international law, democracy and the rule of law is not guaranteed. He highlighted three areas in which to intensify engagement: the human rights implications of the war in Ukraine; artificial intelligence; and challenges to the ECHR. The Commissioner stressed the importance of all human rights mechanisms, at the national, regional and international level, coming together to face current challenges. He pledged to deepen his engagement with NHRIs and to help protect them when they face threats and formulated the plea that everyone intensify their work in standing up for civil society and human rights defenders.

After the conference, the Commissioner met with Debbie Kohner, ENNHRI Secretary General, and several ENNHRI Board members. They exchanged on the importance of co-operation between NHRIs and the Commissioner, and on topics of current common interest, including challenges to the European Convention on Human Rights and the ongoing review of implementation of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on NHRIs.

On 25 November, the Commissioner [spoke](#) at a workshop on 'Ombudsman Institutions and National Human Rights Institutions: Implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendations and Other International Standards', organised by the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH). He underlined that national human rights institutions and ombudsman institutions with a human rights mandate are crucial elements of a state's democratic and human rights architecture. The Commissioner stressed the importance of establishing NHRIs compliant with the UN Paris Principles in member states that still do not have them. He called on governments to recognise their protective role in safeguarding the independence of NHRIs and ombudsman institutions, expressing concern about growing threats to these institutions, including political attacks, gender-based harassment of women in leadership, budgetary constraints and delays in leadership appointments that limit their ability to function effectively.

On 26 November, the Commissioner met with Levan Ioseliani, Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia to discuss recent developments in the country.

On 1 December, the Commissioner congratulated the Ombudsman Institution of Kosovo\* on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, underlining its key role in the protection of human rights and as champion for equality. Speaking via [video message](#), he emphasised that Ombudsman institutions and NHRIs are essential to build bridges between the authorities and the population and, in doing so, help ensuring implementation of international human rights standards, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

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

In his [statement](#) following a visit to Türkiye in December, the Commissioner encouraged the authorities to pursue a reform of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK). (see *Country focus*).

On 11 December, the Commissioner addressed through video message a parliamentary event on “the State of Human Rights in Scotland” at the invitation of the Scottish Human Rights Commission. He welcomed the focus of the event on the delivery of social rights. He also stressed the responsibility of parliament in ensuring that the NHRI has the resources and capacities to carry out its mandate across all human rights, stressing that an effective and independent NHRI is one of the indicators of delivering the UN Sustainable Goals.

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

On 15 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with Mattias Guyomar, President of the European Court of Human Rights and discussed the complementarity between the institutions. The Commissioner reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the European Convention on Human Rights, the Court, its judgments and their execution. He [reiterated](#) this message of support on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights on 4 November.

On 10 December, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the informal Conference of Ministers of Justice, held in Strasbourg. He reiterated that discussions about the ECHR and migration should be evidence-based and respect legal frameworks. He noted that there should be no interference with the principle of non-refoulement, that hierarchies of rights holders who are more or less deserving of protection should not be created, and that the independence of the Court, as well as domestic courts, should be respected.

On 21 October, the Commissioner submitted his [written comments](#) to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Others v. Georgia*. The case, lodged by 120 civil society organisations, 16 media outlets and four individuals, concerns the 2024 Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. The Act requires civil society organisations and media outlets receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as “organisations serving the interests of a foreign power.” In his third party intervention, the Commissioner submitted that the Act’s adoption constituted a component of broader restrictions on the freedoms of expression and association of civil society in Georgia. He provided information to the Court on the basis of which it may consider that the law’s provisions are inconsistent with the criteria of legality, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality, within the meaning of Articles 10(2) and 11(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Commissioner also highlighted that several aspects of the law undermined its declared purpose of ensuring transparency regarding foreign influence over the funding of civil society organisations.

## 6. Co-operation with European and international organisations

### *Meeting with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*

On 17 September, the Commissioner [met](#) with Jan Braathu, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, in the margins of the CoE High-level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to disinformation, held in Valletta. They discussed the state of freedom of expression across OSCE and Council of Europe states.

### *Meeting with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights*

On 2 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Kajsa Ollongren, EU Special Representative for Human Rights in Brussels. They discussed human rights issues of common interest and avenues for further cooperation.

### *Meeting with the Vice-President of the European Parliament*

On 2 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Nicolae Ștefănuță, Vice-President of the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels. They discussed the importance of mainstreaming the human rights of Roma and Travellers across all EU policies and funding.

### *OSCE ODIHR Human Dimension Conference 2025*

On 6 October, the Commissioner delivered the [keynote speech](#) at the OSCE ODIHR Human Dimension Conference 2025 in Warsaw. Addressing the role of multilateralism and human rights in overcoming global dysphoria, the Commissioner underlined the OSCE's essential work and pledged his support in a complementary and cooperative role. In the margins of the event, the Commissioner [met](#) with Vesa Häkkinen, Ambassador of Finland to the OSCE; Neil Holland, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the OSCE and with Maria Telalian, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, where they explored ways to nurture Europe's culture of human rights and make it more resilient.

### *Meeting with the Director of the European Union Gender Equality Agency*

On 23 October, the Commissioner [met](#) with Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Union's Gender Equality Agency (EIGE), in the margins of ILGA-Europe 27th Annual Conference in Vilnius. They exchanged on their common goal of advancing gender equality and strengthening human rights.

### *Meeting with the EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration*

On 20 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with Magnus Brunner, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration in Brussels. They discussed current human rights challenges in Europe in relation to migration, including asylum rights and externalisation.

### *Meeting with LIBE Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group*

On 26 November, the Commissioner had an [exchange](#) with Chair Sophie Wilmès, and several members of the LIBE Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group, during the European

Parliament session in Strasbourg. They discussed topical issues such as people-centred pathways to peace for Ukraine and pressures on civil society and NHRIs.

#### *Meeting with UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation*

On 28 November, the Commissioner met with Mariana Katarova, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation. They exchanged on common priorities and interests.

## 7. Other meetings

#### *Informal Conference of Ministers for Justice of the Council of Europe on cross border cooperation and mutual assistance*

On 19 September, the Commissioner [addressed](#) the Informal Conference of Ministers for Justice of the Council of Europe on “Cross border cooperation and mutual assistance: the strengthening of cooperation to counter transnational crimes”, organised in Valletta under the auspices of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. The Commissioner outlined human rights issues in the context of the Valletta Protocol to the 1959 Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.

#### *Venice Commission: exchange of views and 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary*

On 10 October, the Commissioner had an [exchange of views](#) with the Venice Commission, during its 144<sup>th</sup> plenary session in Venice. In his speech, the Commissioner stressed the complementary relationship between his work –seeking the application of law and promoting legal norms– and the Venice Commission’s role in developing human rights standards and guidance, emphasising continued cooperation. The Commissioner [reiterated](#) the importance of the institutions as complementary human rights actors during the celebration of the [35<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#) of the Venice Commission, on 11 October.

#### *Meeting with member of the Venice Commission in respect of the United States*

On 4 November, the Commissioner met with David Kaye, member of the Venice Commission in respect of the United States and former UN Special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression. They discussed topics of mutual interest.

#### *World Forum for Democracy*

On 5 November, the Commissioner participated in the [World Forum for Democracy](#) discussion on how democracies can rekindle citizen engagement. As democracies face disengagement and the erosion of core freedoms, the discussion explored whether tools such as deliberative forums, citizens’ assemblies, and other forms of public participation can break down barriers, rebuild trust, and help revive democratic life, especially in an era where new technologies present both risks and opportunities for more direct, inclusive and informed participation.

### *Exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers Deputies*

On 18 November, the Commissioner had an [exchange of views](#) with the Committee of Ministers' Deputies. In his introductory remarks, the Commissioner focused on human-centred pathways to peace in Ukraine, AI oversight and the defence of the Convention system.

### *Università Statale di Milano Conference on Human Rights and Rule of Law in Europe*

On 8 September, the Commissioner delivered a [speech](#) on the role of human rights in upholding the rule of law. Speaking at the Università Statale di Milano, the Commissioner reflected on the progress made in human rights, democracy, and rule of law since World War II, highlighting the role of international organisations. He warned that these ideals remain under threat, particularly from political movements in Europe that undermine democratic values, target vulnerable groups and spread disinformation. The Commissioner called for a stronger commitment to human rights, debunking myths about regulation and intolerance, and emphasising the importance of civil society, national human rights institutions, and grassroots activism in defending these principles. There is also a need for greater citizen participation, especially from marginalised groups and young people, in shaping policies. He concluded with a plea to defend the "*stato di diritto*" against current threats to democracy and justice.

### *Meeting with the General Secretary of the European Federation of Public Service Unions*

On 24 September, the Commissioner met with Jan Willem Goudriaan, General Secretary of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), in Strasbourg. They discussed current human rights challenges in Europe in relation to migration and Roma rights.

### *Lecture at the Irish Centre for Human Rights, University of Galway*

On 30 October, the Commissioner delivered a [guest lecture](#) at the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the University of Galway, Ireland. He emphasised the essential role of human rights in building a better future and reflected on how to embed human rights at the heart of today's global challenges.

### *Exchange with students at the Catholic University of Portugal*

On 11 November, the Commissioner had an [exchange](#) with students at the Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon on current human rights challenges in Europe.

### *Meeting with Belarusian Opposition Leader*

On 11 November, the Commissioner met with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarusian Opposition Leader in the margins of the Web Summit in Lisbon.

### *Meeting with Philanthropy Europe Association*

On 21 November, the Commissioner [met](#) with Delphine Moralis, Chief Executive Officer of the Philanthropy Europe Association in Brussels. They discussed the philanthropic sector's support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders in the context of severe funding crises, restrictive laws and crackdowns on activists.

### *Symposium on the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Daniel O’Connell*

On 16 December, the Commissioner delivered the [keynote speech](#) at the commemorative symposium for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Daniel O’Connell “Finding the heart of his global legacy in the 21st Century”, organised by the Embassy of Ireland to the Holy See and the Pontifical Irish College in Rome. The Commissioner explored the resonance of Daniel O’Connell’s legacy in a new era for human rights.

## 8. Communication and information work

Media monitoring for this period recorded a total of 407 news mentions and 1,680 clips regarding the Commissioner’s work. Key coverage focused on the human rights of LGBTI people, the European Court of Human Rights, and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, alongside migration, freedom of assembly, and artificial intelligence. Additionally, the media covered the book [The Unheard 12 Million](#) on the situation of Roma and Travellers in Europe, the report on [‘Externalised asylum and migration policies and human rights law’](#) and the Commissioner’s official visit to Türkiye.

Among the main national and international media outlets covering the work of the Commissioner featured major news agencies such as *Associated Press, AFP, Agence Belga, Agence Europe, Agencia Lusa, ANP, ANSA, AgenSIR, Athens News Agency, Danas, DPA, EFE, Reuters, Polska Agencja Prasowa (PAP), The Press Association, and SDA/ATS*, as well as leading news outlets, including *Avvenire, BBC, Belfast Telegraph, BTA, Blick, Demokrata.hu, Deutsche Welle, EU Observer, Euronews, Express.co.uk, France Info, Gazeta Prawna, Il fatto Quotidiano, InfoMigrants, Irish Legal News, Istanbul Siyasi Haberler, La Libre Belgique, Law Gazette UK, Law Society of Ireland Gazette, The Local Germany, Le Monde, Metro UK, MTI, Mediapart, N1 Info, The Observer, Politico, Polskie Radio, Project Syndicate, Público, RTBF, RFI, RTE, Sapo, The Shift News, The Slovak Spectator, SwissInfo, The Brussels Times, The Guardian, The Independent, Telegraph, The Malta Independent, The Times UK, Times of Malta, Ukrinform, YLE, and Zmina.info*.

The Commissioner gave interviews to *Euronews, EU Observer, Deutsche Welle, Politico, The Guardian, The Observer, Channel 4, Verfassungsblog, LUSA, RTE, YLE, TVP World, Al Jazeera, Efimerida ton Syntakton (EFSYN), Avvenire*.

The Commissioner published an [op-ed](#) in *Project Syndicate* entitled [‘Transactional Diplomacy Cannot Bring Peace to Ukraine’](#). The piece gained significant international reach, being republished in eight countries and five languages, as of 22 December 2025. Outlets included *Novoye Vremya (Ukraine), Gulf Times (Qatar), Vanguardia (Mexico), La Prensa (Nicaragua), The Japan Times (Japan), The Pak Banker (Pakistan), MENAFN (Jordan), and Journal d’Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire)*.

The Commissioner also sent a Letter to the Editors of *The Times UK* on [22 October](#).

A total of 31 news items were published on the [website](#) over the course of four months. The site recorded 226,443 unique visitors and 343,348 page views.

A total of 97 posts were published across five social media channels: [BlueSky](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Mastodon](#), and [X](#). On X alone, these posts reached nearly 190,000 impressions and attracted 1,098 new followers, maintaining a strong 4.5% engagement rate.

The Commissioner's [LinkedIn](#) presence continued to expand, reaching 5,196 followers and securing more than 143,000 impressions and 3,300 reactions (a 6.8% engagement rate). The Commissioner also started posting updates on [Instagram](#) and gained 84 followers and 12,306 views.

Meanwhile, the [newsletter](#) audience grew by 527 subscribers.