

# COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ

**4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT 2020**

**1 October 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, Dunja Mijatović, between 1 October and 31 December.

## 1. Reports and continuous dialogue

### ***Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland on risks to the effective functioning of the Ombudsman institution***

In a [letter](#) addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Zbigniew Rau, published on 22 October, the Commissioner raised her concerns about risks regarding the continuity and the effective functioning of the Polish Ombudsman institution. The letter followed a constitutional challenge to the legal provision allowing the current Ombuds to continue to exercise his functions between the expiry of his mandate and the election of his successor. The Commissioner noted that this challenge, combined with delays in the process of electing a new Ombuds, created a serious risk that this important constitutional body may be left without a head of institution for an unknown period of time. Recalling that under the Venice Principles states are obliged to protect Ombudsman institutions from threats or action aiming at or resulting in their suppression or in any hurdles to their effective functioning, the Commissioner invited the Polish authorities to provide information about how they intended to ensure that the independence and continuity of the Ombudsman institution would remain fully protected.

### ***Letter to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom on the Overseas Operations Bill***

On 3 November, the Commissioner published her [letter](#) to the Speaker and all members of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom in relation to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill. She noted that provisions of the bill gave cause for grave concern about their compliance with the United Kingdom's international human rights obligations and called on Members of Parliament to reject any measures that would undermine the fight against impunity for serious human rights violations or the right of victims to reparations. In this respect, she specifically pointed to the introduction of a presumption against prosecution of service personnel for acts committed more than five years earlier. She noted that this could act as a de facto statute of limitations, and that investigations of serious human rights violations may fail to meet the requirement under the European Convention on Human Rights of being capable of leading to the punishment of those responsible. The Commissioner also expressed concerns about provisions regarding claims for compensation which could undermine victims' rights to prompt and adequate reparations. Additionally, she noted that legislating for a duty for future governments to consider derogating from the Convention in case of any significant overseas operation could serve as a future incentive to avoid scrutiny and accountability for serious human rights violations. She further warned that the discourse around the bill should not draw away much-needed attention from holding perpetrators to account and achieving justice for victims, and that some of the language used had been intimidating to potential claimants and the legal professionals who assist them.

### ***Letter to the Chairman of the Russian Investigative Committee***

On 19 November, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) she had addressed to the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Alexander Bastrykin, concerning the abduction and ill-treatment of nineteen year old Salman Tepsurkaev , a chat moderator on a news channel on

Telegram. In her letter, the Commissioner expressed her deep concern about Salman Tepsurkaev's fate, as his whereabouts were still unknown more than two months after his abduction. She also emphasised that the circumstances of his abduction and ill-treatment indicated that his life and health were in danger and requested information about any action taken by the investigative authorities to establish his whereabouts and ensure his safety. The Commissioner further requested to be notified about the progress of the investigation of this case, noting credible information from various reliable sources about the Chechen police's involvement into the abduction. Lastly, the Commissioner stressed that impunity for serious human rights violations had prevailed in Chechnya for many years and that she attached paramount importance to combating it.

### ***Memorandum on the stigmatisation of LGBTI people in Poland***

In response to the emergence of a widespread pattern of stigmatisation and statements targeting LGBTI people in Poland in recent years, on 3 December the Commissioner published a [memorandum](#) on this topic. The Commissioner called on public officials and opinion makers to stop promoting an atmosphere of hate and intolerance vis-à-vis LGBTI people, and instead improve respect for their human rights, highlighting that stigmatisation and hate speech carry a real risk of legitimising violence.

The memorandum builds on the Commissioner's work for the protection of the human rights of LGBTI people in Europe and followed online consultations with the Polish authorities (Anna Schmidt, Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment; Marcin Warchoń, Secretary of State, and Marcin Romanowski, Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice; and General Jarosław Szymczyk, Chief of Police), the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman institution) and non-governmental organisations working on the rights of LGBTI people, which were held between 12 and 23 October 2020.

The Commissioner strongly urged all public authorities, politicians and opinion leaders in Poland not to engage in hate speech or any discourse stigmatising LGBTI people, and to firmly denounce such actions and statements, including when they come from private parties. She further called on Poland to ensure that hate speech and hate crime based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics are properly punished in law and in practice, including by recognising bias motivated on these grounds as an aggravating circumstance for hate crimes.

Particularly disturbed by the adoption of anti-LGBT declarations and charters by many local governments and municipalities in Poland and by examples of public support for homophobic projects and initiatives, the Commissioner points out that these actions send an alarming signal of public approval for hate, intolerance and exclusion, effectively incentivising such behaviour. Emphasising that LGBTI refers to people, not an ideology, the Commissioner calls for the anti-LGBT declarations and charters to be revoked and urges the Polish government to ensure that initiatives which directly or indirectly promote hate and intolerance against LGBTI people do not receive public support. The Commissioner also calls for the rejection of several bills targeting LGBTI people which are currently pending in the Polish parliament.

The Commissioner also expresses her concern regarding numerous accounts of harassment and intimidation of LGBTI activists in Poland by law enforcement agencies and the public prosecution service, calling on the authorities to fully protect persons defending the rights of LGBTI people from hostility and aggression and to enable them to carry out their activities freely. She also notes with

concern an increasing practice of banning Pride (equality) marches under the pretence of promoting public safety.

The Commissioner calls on Poland to draw up, in close consultation with civil society, the new national action plan on equality which would include provisions explicitly addressing the discrimination of LGBTI people, and to support and promote education campaigns to raise public awareness about human rights of LGBTI people.

***Letter to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the Minister for Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina on migration and asylum***

On 11 December, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zoran Tegeltija, and the Minister for Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Selmo Cikotić, setting out a number of concerns regarding persistent shortcomings in the authorities' handling of migration and asylum. Referring to the seriously substandard living conditions in the Lipa emergency tent camp for migrants and the situation of hundreds of migrants who have been left without accommodation, food and medical care, the Commissioner warned about an unfolding humanitarian crisis. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, Brčko District and the cantons should share the responsibility for hosting migrants and asylum seekers more evenly. Politicians should refrain from stigmatising speech and generalisations about refugees and the authorities should counter vigilante groups which reportedly carry out attacks against them. The Commissioner urges the authorities to conduct independent and impartial investigations into reported attacks and threats targeting human rights defenders who help migrants. She also stresses the need to address the problems which hinder access to the asylum procedure and to speed up asylum decisions. Finally, the human rights of hundreds of unaccompanied migrant children should be upheld, including by assigning them legal guardians, and access to mainstream education for migrant children should be provided uniformly throughout the country.

***Letter to the Prime Minister of Slovenia***

On 11 December, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) to the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Janša, about the government's decision to suspend public funding of the national Slovenian press agency (STA). Underscoring that the STA is a well-respected media outlet which maintains high standards of journalism, the Commissioner expressed her concern that the funding cut could jeopardise the agency's operations. She called on the Prime Minister to use his authority to ensure that the funding is reinstated.

***Online dialogue with Portugal on combating racism and discrimination, and violence against women (15-17 December 2020)***

From 15 to 17 December, the Commissioner held a series of online discussions with the Portuguese authorities and representatives of Portuguese civil society on the following issues: tackling racism and discrimination and fighting discrimination, and violence against women in Portugal.

The Commissioner met online with the Minister of Justice, Francesca Van Dunem; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Augusto Santos Silva; the Minister of the State for the Presidency, Mariana Vieira da Silva; the State Secretary for Citizenship and Equality, Rosa Monteiro; the High Commissioner for Migration, Sónia Pereira; the President of the Commission for Citizenship and Equality, Sandra

Ribeiro; and the Minister of Internal Administration, Eduardo Cabrita. Moreover, she held a discussion with the Ombudswoman, Maria Lucia Amaral, and meetings with representatives of several civil society organisations.

The Commissioner's Memorandum further to her online dialogue with Portugal is forthcoming.

### ***Letter to the French Senate on the General Security Bill***

On 18 December, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) to the Law Committee of the French Senate, urging the senators to make substantial amendments to the General Security Bill to make it more human rights compliant. In particular, in order to avoid an infringement of the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to impart information, she invites the senators to remove the ban on disseminating images of the faces of law enforcement officers engaged in police operations, or any other means of identifying them, with the clear intent to do them physical or psychological harm. The Commissioner also recommends measures to enhance the right to privacy, including stricter limits on the conditions regarding access to CCTV footage of public spaces and certain private spaces, a better definition of the legal framework for the use of body cameras and a strengthening of the safeguards for persons subject to surveillance through drones. Lastly, the Commissioner stressed that it is crucial wherever possible to avoid placing the law enforcement agencies in situations of extreme tension and to secure full respect for their members' economic and social rights.

## **2. Themes**

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

In a [statement](#) published on 21 October, the Commissioner expressed extreme worry about new allegations of collective expulsions of migrants attempting to cross into Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina, denial of access to asylum, and extreme violence used by Croatian law enforcement officers in this context. Despite her previous call on the Croatian authorities to ensure effective and independent investigations into similar allegations, and the government asserting that all allegations are investigated, credible reports of such violations continued and suggested that violence and dehumanising acts accompanying pushbacks are increasing. The Commissioner reiterated that the Croatian authorities should stop pushbacks and border violence and eradicate impunity for serious human rights violations committed against migrants by law enforcement officers. To this end, the authorities were called upon to ensure full co-operation with independent monitoring mechanisms, especially the office of the Croatian Ombudswoman and to publish, as soon as possible after it is adopted, the report of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture on their rapid reaction visit to the country.

On the issue of pushbacks, the Commissioner participated in an exchange with the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Parliamentary Assembly, on 2 December. In the exchange, the Commissioner expressed concern about the widespread practice of pushbacks and the seemingly increasing violence used when they occur. She also noted that some member states' engagement with recent judgments by the ECtHR was problematic, drawing simplistic conclusions from sometimes highly contextual findings of the Court, and noting that the Convention's protections should not be made illusory in this way. She called on parliamentarians to take concrete

steps to prevent pushbacks, by ensuring that recommendations by international bodies, including her own recommendation on the suspension of support to third countries leading to returns to serious human rights violations, were implemented. Further steps included not adopting laws that could allow pushbacks; ensuring strong mandates and support for independent monitoring mechanisms; MPs using their own monitoring possibilities; and using their voices to push for, rather than undermine, accountability, including by refraining from responding to allegations of pushbacks as ‘fake news’ or smearing those who report on such practices.

### ***Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom***

On 7 October, the Commissioner [stressed](#) that the confiscation of the assets of Turkish journalist Can Dunder in criminal proceedings against him continued the worrying pattern of judicial actions targeting journalists in Turkey. She urged the authorities to stop intimidation and harassment of journalists and let them work without fear of reprisals.

On 7 October, the Commissioner commemorated the 14th anniversary of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian investigative journalist known for her invaluable human rights work. In her statement, the Commissioner [emphasised](#) the need for the Russian authorities to deliver justice without further delay, as the masterminds behind Anna Politkovskaya's murder remain unpunished.

On 14 October, the Commissioner delivered [a welcome address](#) at the Online Symposium on enhancing the Safety of Journalists in Europe, organised by the Council of Europe. She underlined that acts of intimidation and reprisal, muzzling legislation and specious lawsuits endanger journalists and restrict the free, pluralist flow of information that is so vital for democracies. The Commissioner concluded that the tragic sequence of murders of journalists in Europe and the many threats they are facing must become a call for action.

On 16 October, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) in commemoration of Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was assassinated three years ago. She stressed that the climate of impunity surrounding this murder defied Malta's human rights obligations to carry out prompt, independent and effective investigations, open to public scrutiny and accessible to victims' families, and designed to punish the perpetrators and the masterminds of killings. She also deplored that the libel lawsuits lodged against Daphne Caruana Galizia, including by government officials, are still pending against her family, and that the investigations into her murder have been hampered by political interference, including through attempts to cut short the ongoing public inquiry. The Commissioner urged the Maltese authorities to make it a top priority to uncover the truth about this murder, ensure the independence of the public inquiry and establish accountability for Daphne Caruana Galizia's death.

On 17 October, following the assassination of French history professor Samuel Paty, perpetrated in connection with a lesson he had delivered on freedom of expression and secularism, the Commissioner [stressed](#) that freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy and implies accepting being disturbed, shocked, and even offended. She added that teaching these requirements is essential and that any form of violence against those conveying these fundamental principles is intolerable.

On 27 October, the Commissioner published a [Human Rights Comment entitled “Time to take action against SLAPPs”](#). She pointed out that journalists, activists, and advocacy groups are the preferred targets of these so-called Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which are abusive lawsuits intended to intimidate and silence critics. These suits pose a significant and growing threat

to the right to freedom of expression in a number of Council of Europe member states, perverting the justice system and the rule of law more generally. To counter SLAPPs effectively, the Commissioner stressed that a comprehensive response should be devised. This should follow a threefold approach: preventing the filing of SLAPPs by allowing the early dismissal of such suits, which should go hand in hand with an awareness raising exercise among judges and prosecutors, and proper implementation of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights on defamation; introducing measures to punish abuse, particularly by reversing the costs of proceedings; and minimising the consequences of SLAPPs by giving practical support to those who are sued. In the Commissioner's view, it is high time to tackle a practice which puts pressure both on journalists and on civil society as a whole and dissuades them from critical reporting.

On the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2 November), the Commissioner [highlighted](#) that widespread impunity for crimes against journalists represents an admission of powerlessness by states which merely emboldens those who want to kill the truth.

On 1 December, on the occasion of the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (the Tromsø Convention), the Commissioner published a [Human Rights Comment on access to official documents](#). Access to official documents is essential for transparency, good governance and participatory democracy and is a key means of facilitating the exercise of other human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Commissioner underlined in particular the importance of freedom of information requests, mainly used by organisations and journalists to ask questions about the conduct of public bodies. Without these requests, a number of human rights violations would never have come to light. Freedom of information requests are also crucial in fighting misinformation. But the right of access to information is not only about exposing wrongdoing. It also helps to improve the quality of public debate on important issues and heightens participation in decision making. The Commissioner called on Council of Europe member states which have not yet ratified the Tromsø Convention to do so as soon as possible. The entry into force of the Tromsø Convention provides a new impetus to make the right of access to official documents a reality for all and for governments to genuinely embrace transparency.

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

On 16 December, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) in which she expressed concern at the escalation of clashes between police and protesters in Albania, following the fatal shooting of a young man by the police during curfew hours. She called on the Albanian authorities to show restraint in policing demonstrations and to ensure thorough, independent and effective investigations into all allegations of excessive use of force. Noting the use of forceful means which have led to the injuring of several protesters and large-scale detentions, including of children, the Commissioner stressed that the response to the Covid-19 pandemic did not give authorities carte blanche to use force when policing assemblies and that the principles of necessity and proportionality must be upheld at all times. Moreover, any detention of children should only be carried out as a measure of last resort and should fully respect their procedural rights, including the right to be questioned only in the presence of a lawyer or one of their parents or guardians. She also underlined the need for police officers to receive training in the negotiated management of assemblies and the proportionate use of force and called on the authorities to identify, bring to justice and sanction those involved in excessive use of force and to ensure that persons claiming to be victims of police misconduct can file complaints to obtain redress. Noting that most persons detained had been freed, the Commissioner urged the authorities to swiftly release any remaining peaceful protesters still in detention. Lastly, regarding the detention of and alleged assaults on

journalists covering the demonstrations, she stressed that attacks on journalists constitute a serious violation of press freedom and the right to be informed and that the authorities must ensure that journalists can continue to inform citizens without fear of threats or violence.

### ***Women's rights and Gender Equality***

On 7 October, the Commissioner gave a [keynote address](#) on the occasion of the annual conference of the network Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) "Structural inequality as the root of violence against women". In her address, she expressed concerns about recent attempts, in several countries, to undermine women's rights. She referred in particular to attacks against the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Istanbul Convention, which are based on false narratives and misrepresentations about the Convention. She reiterated that violence against women is a human rights violation which cannot be tolerated and stressed the Convention's importance for combating discrimination against women and achieving gender equality, a prerequisite to tackling violence against women. Moreover, she deplored renewed attacks against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe and legal abortion care and to comprehensive sexuality education. She highlighted the crucial role played by civil society in defending women's rights and called on member states to take more resolute, comprehensive and long-term action to eliminate structural gender inequality and remedy gender-based violence.

On 25 November, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) urging member states to address cyberviolence targeting women and girls, whose exposure to this type of violence has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cyber-violence takes many forms, including harassment, revenge porn and threats of rape or murder and perpetrators can be partners or ex-partners, colleagues, schoolmates or, often, anonymous individuals. Deploping that women's rights defenders, journalists, politicians and other public figures are particularly exposed to cyberviolence, she stressed that it can deter them from digital participation.

The Commissioner welcomed several Council of Europe initiatives to combat this scourge and urged member states to support NGOs and to co-operate with national human rights institutions and internet companies. She insisted on the need to tackle the root causes of cyberviolence against women by condemning sexism and questioning gender stereotypes. She concluded by urging member states to address cyberviolence against women in order to protect online freedom of expression but also to make the Internet a more open, safe and free platform where gender equality is a reality.

On 25 November, the Commissioner delivered a [video message](#) for the opening of the conference on "The Angry Internet" organised by the Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. She deplored hateful and misogynistic online speech that opens the door to further violence against women and deters them from participating in political, social and cultural life. She stressed the need for further action to combat sexist hate speech against women and the importance for this purpose of the Istanbul Convention and of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism. She also stressed the importance of having men on board notably by means of awareness-raising campaigns.

On 30 November, the Commissioner contributed to the campaign [#16 days of activism](#) to eliminate violence against women of the PACE Network Women free from violence by calling for ratifying and



fully implementing the Istanbul Convention. She tweeted that, to prevent violence against women, we need to tackle stereotyped gender roles and prejudices based on the idea of women's inferiority.

On 3 December, the Commissioner gave an opening [speech](#) in a webinar on violence against women and girls in France, organised by the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. In her address, she focused on the crucial role of the Istanbul Convention to combat a broad range of forms of violence against women. She mentioned the role that States parties to the Convention can play to promote ratification by sharing their experience with countries that have not yet ratified it and encouraging them to accede to this landmark international instrument.

### ***Children's rights***

On 12 November, the Commissioner participated in an event to mark the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, organised by the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division. In her speech, she underlined the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, which is about cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. In an environment where children are regularly exposed to sexualised images, they should learn about their bodies and their rights, about gender identities, gender equality and sexual orientations to feel empowered and develop safe and respectful relationships throughout their lives. She pointed to her [Human Rights Comment](#) of July 2020, which was prompted by her concern about the recent proliferation of distorted information about sexuality education, and called for continued co-operation between governments, civil society, educators and activists to prevent retrogression and uphold the right to comprehensive sexuality education as an integral part of fighting against sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

On the occasion of World Children's Day, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) on 19 November, expressing her concern that Covid-19 may have long-term adverse effects on children's health, safety, education and living conditions. She underlined that the pandemic had exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, undermining children's ability to enjoy human rights, and called on governments to prioritise the best interest of the child in all their measures to mitigate the effects of Covid-19, taking inspiration from the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. She added that efforts to protect children from violence, poverty and neglect should be strengthened and that one should never forget children's rights to play, enjoy leisure, and receive adequate psychological support when needed. She called on member states to step up their co-operation with international bodies, children's Ombudspersons and youth organisations, involving children in all processes and empowering them to take up the many challenges that lie ahead.

### ***Human rights of LGBTI persons***

On 8 October, a representative of the Commissioner's Office participated in a conference entitled "A Living Instrument for Everyone: the Role of the European Convention on Human Rights in Advancing the human rights of LGBTI people" organised by the European Court of Human Rights and the SOGI Unit of the Council of Europe, on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Office representative presented an overview of the Commissioner's [Third-Party Intervention](#) in the case of *Buhuceanu and Ciobotaru v. Romania*, dealing with the lack of a legal framework at the national level for the recognition of stable same-sex relationships.

On 23 October, the Commissioner took part in the [closing panel](#) of the 2020 Gathering Online of the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe). ILGA-Europe's annual conference, which was held online this year, gathers hundreds of LGBTI activists from around Europe. The closing panel featured a discussion of the way forward in the protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people in Europe. Some of the issues discussed included the required emphasis on reducing the inequalities experienced by LGBTI people, including in their access to economic and social rights; keeping LGBTI issues on the agenda despite competing priorities; building new partnerships; and better supporting LGBTI defenders and organisations, including financially.

On 26 October, on Intersex Awareness Day, the Commissioner [called on](#) all Council of Europe member states to protect the bodily autonomy and the right to health of intersex people.

On 20 November, the Trans Day of Remembrance, commemorating persons who were killed because of being transgender, the Commissioner [warned](#) that hate speech enables violence. She urged Council of Europe member states to take urgent steps to reverse the alarming spread of anti-transgender rhetoric in Europe.

On 21 December, the Commissioner [welcomed](#) the adoption by the parliament of Switzerland of two new laws introducing marriage for same-sex couples and legal gender recognition based on self-determination. She observed that a growing number of Council of Europe member states have such laws (17 with same-sex marriage and 8 with legal gender recognition based on self-determination).

### ***Human rights of older persons***

On 1 October, on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, the Commissioner published a [statement](#) on the need for more reflection and reaction as a result of the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on older persons. She reiterated that these effects had not only been caused by the characteristics of the virus which affects older persons more, but also by inadequate crisis management and long-standing structural failings in member states, in particular a non-human rights compliant approach to the delivery of long-term care to older persons. The Commissioner stated that reverting to business as usual was not an option and that the terrible record of this pandemic for older persons entails a duty on us all to reassess the attitude of our societies to ageing and to thoroughly reform social care systems in order to put the autonomy and dignity of older persons at their centre.

### ***Human rights of Persons with Disabilities***

To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) regarding the need for a renewed impetus to deliver on member states' commitments concerning the human rights of persons with disabilities. She pointed to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had particularly exposed serious failings regarding the respect of a number of core rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, such as disability-inclusive emergency preparedness; accessibility; access to health care; the right to live independently and to be included in the community; access to information; and participation and involvement in decision and policy-making by persons with disabilities. She stressed that the Covid-19 pandemic shows that these standards are not just aspirational ideals and that failure to implement them leads to suffering and loss of life, which could and should have been avoided or alleviated.

### ***Racism and Xenophobia***

On 24 November, the Commissioner held an online round-table meeting with human rights defenders working for combating Afrophobia in Europe. The event gathered human rights defenders from several member states of the Council of Europe, members of the Commissioner's Office, and other Council of Europe representatives. The round-table sought to map and assess major trends in racism and racial discrimination affecting people of African descent in Europe and to explore possible ways to address them, as well as to identify proposals regarding the protection of human rights defenders active in combating Afrophobia and the promotion of their work. The discussions provided an opportunity for fruitful exchanges, aimed at allowing the Commissioner to define her future activities related to combating Afrophobia in the Council of Europe area, and in support of human rights defenders working in this field.

### ***Transitional justice***

On 5 October, the Commissioner had an exchange of views on transitional justice issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Commissioner pointed out that reconciliation has stalled in the region and is being superseded by mounting ethnic divisions and polarisation, as manifested in particular in the denial of genocide, glorification of war criminals and attempts to rehabilitate persons involved in crimes committed during the wars of the 1990s. The Commissioner also pointed out that divisions have been exacerbated by historical revisionism related to World War II, inflammatory discourse by certain political leaders, and persisting ethnic segregation in education. She stressed the need to eradicate discrimination in education and divisions along ethnic lines; fight against impunity for war related crimes and denial of genocide; and step up the search for missing persons in the region.

On 18 November, on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Vukovar, Croatia, the Commissioner [emphasised](#) the importance of truth and justice for the victims and called for increased regional efforts to solve the cases of hundreds of persons that remain missing, including the opening of police and military archives.

On 18 December, in a video speech for an online conference organised by the Italian Embassy in Sarajevo "*Twenty-five years later. The Dayton Agreement and the European Pathway for Bosnia and Herzegovina*", the Commissioner underlined that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains mired in serious structural problems and a complex and expensive administrative and political system, clogged up by the excessive protection of the interests of ethnic groups. She underlined some positive aspects of the Constitution, including the direct application of the European Convention on Human Rights and its priority over all other law, and human rights institutions that have delivered landmark decisions. However, she also pointed to the discriminatory nature of the Bosnian electoral system and deplored the lack of political will for the implementation of the *Sejdić and Finci* group of judgments. The Commissioner emphasised the role of the younger generations in leading the country towards a brighter future, and the role of the Council of Europe and the European Union in ensuring that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not only peaceful, but also based on a functioning system guaranteeing human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

### ***Data protection***

On 9 November, the Commissioner participated in a webinar on [setting democratic global standards for intelligence agencies](#) co-organised by the Council of Europe Data Protection Unit and the

delegation of the Dutch political party Democrats 66 (D66) in the European Parliament. In her intervention, the Commissioner stressed the crucial importance of democratic and effective oversight of national security services. She highlighted the guiding principles set out in the Issue Paper published by her Office in 2015 on this subject, and in particular the need for: involvement of parliaments; *ex ante* authorisation of the most intrusive measures; an independent body able to issue legally binding decisions over complaints by individuals affected by security activities, and to access all intelligence-related information; oversight bodies mandated to scrutinise the human rights compliance of security service co-operation with foreign bodies, including exchange of information, joint operations and the provision of equipment and training.

### ***Human rights and Environment***

On 18 December, the Commissioner hosted an online roundtable with fourteen environmental human rights defenders hailing from across Europe and representing a wide spectrum of expertise. The event was a valuable opportunity to identify specific problems faced by human rights defenders and activists working on environmental issues, to provide a platform for participants to exchange and learn from one another, and to help to identify and select areas where the Commissioner could bring most added value in the future. In opening the discussion, the Commissioner emphasised that the environment and human rights are interdependent, and that in order to protect human rights, we must urgently get more serious about looking after the environment we live in. Acknowledging that some among the participants had faced pushbacks or reprisals for their work, she stressed that facing harassment for speaking up for environmental causes is absolutely unacceptable, and that she will continue to work towards the protection of human rights defenders across Europe. Throughout the event, participants shared their views on the major environmental rights themes facing Europe; on working methods and good practices linking human rights to the environment; on reprisals, restrictive environments and related responses; and on areas/themes where the Commissioner's action and voice would be most beneficial.

### ***Human rights implications of the Covid-19 pandemic***

On 10 December, the Commissioner delivered a [keynote speech](#) opening an event organised by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, the University of Vienna, and Amnesty International Austria on the impact of Covid-19 on human rights. The Commissioner stressed that the pandemic acted as a magnifying glass on all existing inequalities in Europe and exacerbated many of them. It also shone a light on the structural problems affecting health systems and the ubiquity of gender inequality. The digital divide, which the pandemic also clearly exposed, was an especially pressing concern to address because of its long-lasting negative impact. Acknowledging the importance of combating disinformation that can cause panic and social unrest, she warned that this should not be used as a pretext to introduce disproportionate restrictions on press freedom. The Commissioner stressed the need to give greater prominence to human rights in our societies, starting with equal enjoyment of social and economic rights and equal access to health care and education.

### ***National Human Rights Structures***

On 22 October, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) addressed to the Polish authorities, in which she raised her concerns about risks to the continuity and effectiveness of the Ombudsman institution, in light of delays in the selection of a successor to the mandate's incumbent and a constitutional challenge about transitional arrangements (see also section above on Reports and Continuous Dialogue).

On 20 November, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#) calling on the Parliament in Hungary to postpone the vote on a package of laws with potentially adverse effects on human rights, including a legislative act merging the equality body, or Equal Treatment Authority, and the Ombudsman institution (more details below).

On 3 December, the Commissioner spoke at a webinar organised by the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in France, the *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme*, on women's rights 25 years after the Beijing Declaration (see also section above on Women's Rights).

On 4 December, the Commissioner participated in a discussion organised by the Croatian Ombudswoman as a part of the series of online human rights discussions [Online#KavaZaLjudskaPrava](#). The participants included the Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, Mr Boris Milošević, representatives of academia and other national human rights structures in Croatia, as well as NGOs. The discussion focused on major human rights challenges in the Council of Europe region; the protection of human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on vulnerable and minority groups; freedom of expression; human rights of migrants, including asylum seekers; artificial Intelligence and education about digital rights; the dangers of misinformation; and the protection of human rights defenders.

On 11 December, a member of the Office of the Commissioner attended [ENNHRI's annual conference](#) online. This year's conference focused on the importance of the co-operation between NHRIs and regional bodies, including the EU and the Council of Europe, to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law.

### ***Human rights and rule of law***

On 20 November, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#), urging Hungary's Parliament to postpone a vote on draft bills that could undermine democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Commissioner noted that amendments to constitutional and legal provisions had been submitted without prior consultation, proposing among others to further broaden the powers of the President of the Kúria; raise the threshold for small parties to stand in Parliamentary elections; integrate the independent Equal Treatment Authority into the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights; diminish scrutiny over public funds; and further stigmatise LGBTI people, including by effectively banning them from adopting a child. She recalled the Venice Commission [Opinion](#) that such extensive legislative proposals, particularly constitutional amendments, should not be introduced during states of emergency when opportunities for public discussion and scrutiny are restricted and called on the Hungarian Parliament to engage in broad consultations prior to voting. The amendments were adopted in December 2020, prompting international and national criticism.

### ***Human rights in armed conflicts***

On 1 October, the Commissioner published a [statement](#), deeply regretting the resumption of the military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. She reminded both states about their obligation under the European Convention on Human Rights to safeguard the right to life and to protect populations from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In addition, she emphasised the importance of objective reporting from the conflict zone, as misreporting and propaganda can only inflame tensions further, and called on the media to apply the highest possible standards of journalistic ethics and professionalism when reporting on the conflict. Lastly, the

Commissioner underlined that there is an imperative need to avoid political rhetoric designed to fuel tension between the two countries and that the authorities in both countries should take action against any use of hate speech in the media and promote mutual understanding and trust. She urged both sides to stop military escalation and resume negotiations for a peaceful settlement to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **3. Other meetings**

#### ***Normandy Peace Forum***

On 2 October, the Commissioner spoke at an event on “Freedom in a time of crisis” at [Normandy Peace Forum](#), organised by the WARM Foundation, an international foundation working on contemporary conflicts through war reports and education. The Commissioner addressed the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for a human rights compliant response to this unprecedented emergency.

#### ***7th Annual Regional Rule of Law Forum, Baden-Baden***

On 16 October, the Commissioner participated in the [7th Annual Regional Rule of Law Forum](#) in Baden-Baden, along with several judges and former judges of the European Court of Human Rights. The event was organised by the Aire Centre and Civil Rights Defenders and included the online participation of over 200 legal professionals from the region through the hubs in Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tirana and Zagreb. Underlining that the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing inequalities in the enjoyment of human rights, the Commissioner stressed that it is high time to bridge these gaps and harness the power of human rights as an effective antidote for society as a whole.

#### ***Meeting with Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin***

On 12 November, the Commissioner held an online meeting with the Secretary of State of the Holy See, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin. The meeting took place as part of a series of meetings that Cardinal Parolin held with the Council of Europe’s institutions in connection with the activities celebrating the 50th anniversary of the presence of the Holy See as Permanent Observer in the Council of Europe. The Commissioner and His Eminence discussed human rights issues related to migration, violence against women and LGBTI people.

#### ***Meeting with the European Union Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson***

On 24 November, Commissioner Mijatović had a video meeting with the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson. The meeting provided a follow up to their exchange of letters about the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in March, but also provided an opportunity to discuss other issues. In relation to migration, they spoke about pushbacks, reception emergencies, and specific regional developments. They also exchanged on issues related to counterterrorism and the protection of children from abuse online.

### ***Meeting with the European Union Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli***

On 26 November, Commissioner Mijatović met online with the European Union Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. The discussion consisted in an exchange of information concerning their respective work and current issues related to the human rights of LGBTI people and women's rights. It was agreed to continue the dialogue on these issues, as well as to discuss other equality issues of mutual interest in the near future.

### ***Participation in the North South Centre #SolidAction campaign***

On 1 December, the Commissioner participated in the North South Centre #SolidAction campaign, a global call for collective mobilisation for solidarity to fight against inequalities. In her [message](#) posted on Twitter the Commissioner stressed that the COVID-19 health crisis has brought death, sorrow and fear but also a great opportunity to rethink our priorities and refocus on solidarity and the realisation of human rights for all. She underscored the need to strengthen the place human rights occupy in our society, starting by giving a more central focus to solidarity and the equal enjoyment of social and economic rights.

### ***Event on EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy***

On 7 December, the Commissioner participated in an event, organised by the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe for the launch of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, alongside the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore. In her remarks, the Commissioner welcomed the Action Plan as coming at a crucial time and noted the overlap with some of her own activities, such as the protection of human rights defenders and the strengthening of civil society, the rights of women and girls, media freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and combating discrimination of vulnerable groups, including LGBTI persons. She also welcomed the separate section focusing on the role of artificial intelligence and technology and human rights. She noted that internal problems with human rights in the EU also impacted on the effectiveness of its external action, specifically highlighting the rights of women and LGBTI persons, as well as migration policy.

### ***Virtual fireside chat “women and human rights – personal stories” organised by the German Presidency of Council of Europe***

On 8 December, the Commissioner participated in the [virtual fireside chat](#) “women and human rights – personal stories” hosted by the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection within the framework of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. Along with the German member of the Venice Commission and former Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights, Angelika Nussberger and the human rights lawyer Nani Jansen Reventlow – she shared her personal stories and discussed the position of women in human rights law.

### ***Joint op-ed with EU Commissioner Dalli for International Human Rights Day***

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day on 10 December, the Commissioner published an [opinion editorial](#) in Euractiv together with the EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. They affirmed that the current pandemic crisis serves as a magnifying glass for all existing inequalities in Europe – racism, gender and sexual discrimination, treatment of migrants – and that there is still a long way to go to ensure full and real equality in Europe. They underscored the need for a renewed

commitment by national authorities to uphold the founding values and legal obligations set out by the European Union and the Council of Europe, and they called on member states to uphold the pledge to achieve equality they made when they adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

#### ***Virtual event on "Standing with Women Leaders of Belarus"***

On 11 December, the Commissioner took part in a [virtual event](#) on "Standing with Women Leaders of Belarus" hosted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Washington D.C. The event aimed at bringing attention to the current human rights situation in Belarus and seeking possible ways to advance peaceful and democratic changes in this country. Panellists included international and regional policymakers as well as prominent women leaders from Belarus. In her speech, while noting that Belarus was not a member state of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner emphasised that the Belarusian government bore responsibility for human rights violations committed in the aftermath of the presidential elections and noted with regret that those responsible enjoyed total impunity for those large-scale violations. She also praised civil society, journalists and human rights defenders for their invaluable contribution to advancing democratic changes by peaceful means and highlighted the special role played by all the courageous women in Belarus.

## **4. Human Rights Defenders**

The Commissioner continued to pay close attention to the situation of human rights defenders in her country and thematic work during the period under review.

On 27 October, the Commissioner published a Human Rights Comment on the need to take action against so-called [Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation \(SLAPPs\)](#) used to censor, harass and ultimately suppress criticism. The Commissioner stressed that those lawsuits may be used against activists, NGOs and human rights defenders to intimidate them, hamper their legitimate work and discourage them from the exercise of their rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression (see also section above on Safety of journalists, freedom of expression and media freedom).

On 7 December, the Commissioner issued a [statement](#), expressing concern about a series of legislative amendments introduced to the Russian parliament that restrict the rights of NGOs and the freedoms of association, assembly and expression. The Commissioner criticised particularly problematic provisions, such as those granting discretionary powers to the Ministry of Justice to ban or approve the activities of NGOs or to initiate their dissolution, as falling short of European human rights standards. She further noted that blanket and discriminatory bans on certain activities by NGOs receiving foreign funding affect their freedoms of assembly and expression, as well as their right to effective participation in public decision-making. The Commissioner also expressed her dismay at the increasing stigmatisation and harassment of civil society and human rights defenders in Russia, which would expand even further with the adoption of those amendments. She stressed that those legislative amendments might be used as a tool for silencing legitimate criticism of the state authorities from civil society and recommended that Russian lawmakers align the current legislation on NGOs with European and international human rights standards.



On 24 November, the Commissioner held an online roundtable with human rights defenders working on combating Afrophobia in various Council of Europe member states. Among many other issues, the discussion focused on the situation of human rights defenders and activists fighting racism and Afrophobia in Europe, challenges they face in carrying out their legitimate activities, and possible solutions. Participants sought, inter alia, to identify good practices and recommendations regarding their protection and the promotion of their work (see also section above on Racism).

On 18 December, the Commissioner held a roundtable with human rights defenders working on environmental protection and human rights in Europe. The discussion focused on many environmental issues and the situation of environmental activists and NGOs, many of whom have faced various forms of reprisals for their environmental activism. During the event, participants shared their views on the major environmental rights themes facing Europe; on working methods and good practices linking human rights to the environment; on reprisals, restrictive environments and related responses; and on areas/themes where the Commissioner's action and voice would be most beneficial (see also section above on Human rights and the Environment).

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

### ***Submission to the Committee of Ministers in the context of the supervision of the execution of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Yordanova and Others v. Bulgaria***

On 2 November, the Commissioner published her [submission](#) to the Committee of Ministers regarding the supervision of the execution of the judgment of 24 April 2012 delivered by the Court in the case of *Yordanova and Others v. Bulgaria*, which concerns the planned eviction of Roma people from an informal settlement in Sofia. In the submission, the Commissioner stressed that in addition to seriously infringing the right to adequate housing, forced evictions may lead to violations of a wide spectrum of human rights, meaning that it is essential to prevent them. Furthermore, she pointed out that states have an obligation to limit the risk of human rights violations related to evictions and to ensure that the principles of proportionality and non-discrimination are respected in any eviction process. Noting that the problem of evictions of Roma in Bulgaria can only be effectively addressed in the context of a broader effort to tackle the widespread prejudice and institutional racism against Roma and through structural changes in the area of housing rights, the Commissioner reiterated her concerns about the numerous obstacles to Roma access to social housing. Lastly, the Commissioner noted that for the vicious circle of evictions to be stopped, the authorities have to move away from punitive approaches and start addressing the housing situation of Roma on the basis of the relevant international human rights standards, and provided details of steps that in her view should be taken to prevent forced evictions in the light of these standards.

### ***Submission to the Committee of Ministers in the context of the supervision of the execution of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic***

On 9 November, the Commissioner published her [submission](#) to the Committee of Ministers with regard to the case of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, relating to a violation of Article 14 ECHR (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education) on account of the fact that children were assigned to special education as a result of their Roma origin. In her submission, the Commissioner noted that measures taken to improve the inclusion of Roma

children in mainstream education had not provided the breakthrough necessary to solve the deep-rooted inequalities that underlie discrimination against Roma children in education. She emphasised the need for broader measures that look more widely at a whole range of issues including the impact of institutionalised anti-Gypsyism, poverty, social exclusion and territorial segregation; the protection of Roma children from hostility and violence; resistance to inclusion from professionals and the public at large; and the inclusion in the school curriculum of human rights, non-discrimination and awareness of Roma history and culture and the relevant teacher training. The Commissioner also recommended several steps to ensure the sustainability of the inclusion of Roma children in mainstream, quality education, building on positive measures already in place. In this context, she also pointed to guidance provided in the Position Paper '[Fighting school segregation in Europe through inclusive education](#)' which was published by her Office in 2017.

***Third Party Intervention before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Katarzyna Formela and Sylwia Formela v. Poland and 3 other applications, Cecylia Przybyszewska v. Poland and 9 other applications, and Antoni Meszkes v. Poland***

On 13 November, the Commissioner published her [written observations](#) to the European Court of Human Rights concerning a number of cases against Poland relating to the absence of a legal framework for the recognition of stable same-sex relationships.

In her observations, the Commissioner emphasised that stable same-sex couples, with or without children, are part of the rich diversity of families that make up our societies – regardless of whether a state recognises them or not. She stressed that in the absence of such recognition, however, they are barred from fully enjoying their right to private and family life, as guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 8), and that this has a substantial impact on their daily lives. The Commissioner also stressed that, consistent with the Court's case-law, states should afford same-sex couples effective and non-discriminatory legal recognition in the form of civil marriage, civil unions or registered partnerships. Such recognition must offer a clear and predictable framework and be comprehensive enough to cover the needs of a couple in a stable relationship in all aspects of life.

The Commissioner further highlighted the growing consensus in Europe on this issue, with 30 Council of Europe member states currently providing legal recognition for same-sex couples in one form or another. At the same time, she pointed out that the absence of consensus at national level cannot be considered a valid argument to deny legal recognition to same-sex couples. The Commissioner submitted that it would be particularly unfortunate to lend credence to this argument where links can be detected between such a lack of consensus and a policy of stigmatisation actively promoted by public authorities.

The Commissioner concludes that the principle of equality before the law requires that legal recognition should be available to same-sex partners and that the absence of legal recognition for same-sex couples constitutes discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

***70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights***

On 4 November, the Commissioner spoke at the ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights held during the Committee of Ministers' 130<sup>th</sup> Formal Session in Athens. The Commissioner [stressed](#) that the European Convention on Human Rights has been instrumental in protecting individuals from state abuse and paved the way for major societal

changes. The Convention, its Protocols and the system that stems from it have become a lodestar for those pursuing justice, dignity and equality.

## 6. Communication and Information work

More than 260 news items from different national and international outlets reported about the Commissioner's work. The main topics covered by the media were women's rights, and the human rights of LGBTI people and of migrants.

The work on women's rights was widely covered by a variety of national and international news outlets, including *ABC News, AFP, Agence Europe, ANSA, BBC, CBN, CNN, Corriere della Sera, Daily Mail, Danas, Der Spiegel, Deutsche Welle, DPA, El Pais, EuObserver, Euronews, Fakt.pl, Forbes, France24, Gazeta Wyborcza, Independent Online, Jyllands-Posten, Le Figaro, Le Journal de Montréal, Le Monde, Les Echos, Libération, Linkiesta.it, Malta Today, Marie Claire, Mediapart, N1 Info, Newsweek, Open Democracy, ORF, Ouest France, Reuters, RFI, RTV Slovenija, SIR, SME.sk, STT, Süddeutsche Zeitung, TASR, The Associated Press, The Canadian Press, The Daily Mirror, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Irish Times, The New York Times, The Slovak Spectator, The Washington Post, Time, Tribune de Genève, TV5 Monde, Unian, VOA, and WP.pl.*

The Commissioner's work on LGBTI people continued to attract media coverage, mainly from *444.hu, AFP, Agence Europe, ANSA, APA, Bild, DPA, HIRTV.hu, Hungary Today, Magyar Hirlap, Mannschaft Magazin, MTI, Nepszava, OE24.at, ORF, OTS, Queer.de, Tiroler Tageszeitung, BHRT, Bild, Deutsche Welle, Euractiv, Euronews, France24, Gazeta Wyborcza, Hina, Katholisch.de, KNA, Le Monde, L'Humanité, Politico, Reuters, RFI, RTBF, Rzeczpospolita, SwissInfo.ch, Tetu, and The Telegraph Online.*

The Commissioner's work on migration also remained prominent in the media coverage. The main media reporting on it were *Agence Europe, AFP, Al Jazeera, BETA, Bild, Danas, Dnevni Avaz, HINA, Jutarnji List, N1 Info, RFE/RL, The Associated Press, Euronews, OBCT, ABC News, Avvenire, The Independent, PAP, Reuters, SwissInfo, Tanjug and The Washington Post.*

On freedom of expression and media freedom the Commissioner's work was covered mainly by *AFP, ANSA, Deutsche Welle, EFE, El Pais, EurActiv, Hinq, The Independent, La Vanguardia, Le Figaro, Le Monde, Le Parisien, Le Point, L'Obs, Mediapart, OBCT, Panorama, Reporter.gr, RTV Slovenija, STA, SDA/ATS, The Associated Press, The Washington Post, Times of Malta, Top Channel, and TV5 Monde.*

The Commissioner's concerns about the impact on human rights of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh were reported mainly by *Public Radio of Armenia, TASS, AdnKronos, ANSA, AzerNews, BBC, Corriere della Sera, EFE, Independent Online, La Vanguardia, Ria Novosti, RTBF, The Guardian, The Times, Trend and Vestnik Kavkaza.*

The Commissioner published two opinion editorials. One focused on equality and was cosigned with the European Union Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. The second was published by Deutsche Welle and assessed the human rights situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Balkans 25 years after the Dayton agreement.

Additional coverage concerned Roma rights (*BNT, BTA, Chernomore.bg, Dnes, Fakti, Mediapool.bg, SEGA, StandartNews.com, Radio Svobodna Evropa, Rossiyskaya Gazeta*), COVID-19 and human rights (*Agence Europe, ANSA, Danas, FENA, Fonet, Hina, N1 Info, Pravo.ru, Reporter, Gazeta Wyborcza*), human rights defenders (*Rapsi, Rzeczpospolita, TVN24, Ukrinform, TASS, Radio Free Europe*), transitional justice (*Al Jazeera Balkans, Hina, Index.hr, N1 Info, Vijesti, Balkan Insight*), the independence of the judiciary (*Agence Europe, Il resto del Carlino*), racism (*The Associated Press*), children's rights (*Cyprus Mail, In Cyprus, Reporter Cyprus*), minorities (*The New York Times*), and freedom of information (*Agence Europe, BonDia, Diaria Andorra*).

On Twitter, 68 tweets were published, earning a total number of 2.6 million impressions, an engagement rate of 1.7% and an increase of 4397 followers (+8.95%). On Facebook, 53 posts reached 174k people and garnered 391 new page likes (+3.3%).

Over 330 000 unique visitors consulted the Commissioner's website. This represents an increase of 32% compared to the same period of 2019.