Activity Report

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Content

Opening Observations by the Commissioner 3

1 Country Focus 7
Introduction 7
1.1 Visits 7
1.2 Letters and statements 8
1.3 Meetings with authorities 9

2 Thematic Focus 11
Introduction 11
2.1 Impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights 11
2.2 Human rights of Roma and Travellers 13
2.3 Human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants 14
2.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human rights 15
2.5 Environment and human rights 15
2.6 Women's rights and gender equality 16
2.7 Children's rights and rights of young people 16
2.8 Human rights of LGBTI people 16
2.9 Social rights 17
2.10 Freedom of association and freedom of assembly 18
2.11 Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists 18
2.12 Combating racism and intolerance 18
2.13 Transitional justice 19
2.14 Human Rights and sport 19

3 Human Rights Defenders 20

4 Co-operation with national human rights structures 21

5 System of the European Convention on Human Rights 22

6 Co-operation with European and international organisations 22

7 Other meetings 23

8 Communication Work 27

9 Staff and Budget 28

Appendix 29

OPENING OBSERVATIONS BY THE COMMISSIONER

As I come to the close of my first year as Commissioner, I observe that we are at an inflection point for the protection of human rights.

On the one hand, we must acknowledge that the modern-day human rights system is astonishing, arguably the greatest achievement of modernity. What is more, it is unique – the only road map for the honouring of human dignity that has, on a formal level, been repeatedly affirmed and re-affirmed by all states – most famously at the World Conferences on Human Rights, in the Council of Europe's 2023 Reykjavik Declaration, and most recently, at last September's United Nations Summit of the Future. And the system continues to develop, as evidenced by, for instance, the adoption on 12 March 2025 by the Council of Europe of a Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer.

But, on the other hand, notwithstanding what has been accomplished, today we stand at a precipice over which we might lose much, if not all. There at least six elements to this time of crisis.

- First, we are in a moment of history at which our societies have largely forgotten why we have a human rights system in place. How it was an essential element in the post-war construction of this continent and of our modern world. Those who witnessed or took part in the shaping of the system are mostly no longer with us. And the forgetting is exacerbated by the decline in human rights education in our schools.

- Second, today we see a novel willingness of increasing numbers of political leaders to disavow rights, to dismiss the legal commitments, to renege on treaty obligations.

- Third, less visible but also pernicious is the commonplace pushing of human rights considerations to the edges of governance and the incremental but insidious weakening of elements of its national, regional and global protection mechanisms.

- Fourth, all of these developments occur in and are interwoven with populist political tendencies that coarsen discourse and erode both institutions and social bonds of trust.

- Fifth, it has become fashionable also to question the validity of human rights within certain intellectual circles – to argue that they no longer serve a useful function for our societies, that they are 'past their sell-by date'.

- Sixth, and finally, this moment of crisis for human rights is exactly the one when they are more needed than ever – a moment when we face an urgent and imperative need to install respect for humanity at the heart of engagement with conflict and beyond.

Faced by this moment of grave concern for human rights, we must rally - imbue each other with the sense of urgency, gather to defend and strengthen the system. And we should do all of this with a sense of outrage about what is being put at risk. As Stephane Hessel put it in his great polemic on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *Indignez Vous!*

Hessel and others have also pointed to how we need to go forward with clarity, resolution and a sense of renewal. Renewal must be informed by the need to deliver respect for the human rights of everyone in our societies in all their extraordinary diversity. A core challenge is that of how to reignite a fire for human rights across society while at the same time never relenting on our defence of the most marginalised and overlooked.

We are all challenged, both personally and institutionally. There is much to say about the diverse and essential roles – of civil society, of national human rights institutions and equality bodies, of courts and parliaments, of educators, of the media and of the private sector. But states remain the life blood for the protection of human rights. The entire

system is built on and around them. Never has their role been more consequential in terms of the protection of human rights at home and abroad.

Nationally, governments need to embed human rights at the heart of their work; finally, to mainstream them and to interrogate the impact they should have for every aspect of governance, including the economy. To aid them, they should adopt meaningful national human rights plans of action. States also have a high responsibility to nurture civil society space and to protect their communities of human rights defenders.

And, of course, when I refer to states I am also referring to regional and local governance where there is still much to do. Recall how Eleanor Roosevelt reminded us that universal human rights only make sense if they have meaning in the 'small places, close to home'.

Abroad, I would encourage governments to be sturdier in their defence of human rights. I acknowledge that states do much good work in multilateral fora, such as here at the Council of Europe. But I believe we are in a moment when human rights need to be more visible also in bilateral foreign policy. I also welcome and encourage those informal coalitions of states around selected human rights issues and themes (I repeatedly see the impact of their efforts). And I appreciate the valuable role that is played by the still small but growing community of national human rights ambassadors.

Be it at home or abroad, we need to hear from our political leaders, repeatedly and loudly, on the importance of human rights. Never have we had greater need for them to be defended in powerful, clear unambiguous words.

I, for my part, will continue to seek to engage the totality of my mandate in the promotion and protection of human rights across our member states.

In my first year I have carried out my responsibilities closely aligned to the priorities I laid out when I took up office.

My top priority has been respect for the human rights of the people of Ukraine. I have visited there three times since 2023 (twice as Commissioner). I seek every opportunity to express solidarity with the people of Ukraine, its national human rights community and its civil society. I support initiatives to address the human rights and wellbeing of people in occupied territories, in detention and/or taken to Russia, including children. I continue to encourage support for the delivery of social as well as civil and political rights.

I have laid out a set of ten action areas that need to be addressed for human rights to be at the heart of any path to peace. These are: the ensuring of criminal accountability; delivery of redress / reparations for victims; giving priority attention to the situations of prisoners, children and missing persons; supporting the return of internally displaced persons and refugees; standing up for the rights of people in temporarily occupied territories; supporting the transition out of a period of martial law; embedding human rights as a golden thread for reconstruction; aligning peace related human rights commitments with the EU accession pathway; honouring the peace-making role of women; giving civil society a place at the peace-making table.

I will continue to seek attention to these issues and, otherwise, will remain closely engaged for the human rights of the people of Ukraine.

My second priority has been to support the embedding of human rights considerations at the heart of the engagement with the great issues of our times. In the past year, two have been at the focus of my attention: migration challenges and the roll-out of artificial intelligence.

In recent years I have visited many of the external borders of our member states. In some places I have observed good practice and improvements in terms of access to asylum procedures and reception conditions. However, I am particularly concerned regarding the phenomena of externalisation and systematic violations at borders, including in response to instrumentalisation.

Externalisation is the practice by which states seek to have aspects of their own responsibilities for asylum procedures or border control managed offshore. There are different models of externalisation, each raising distinct human rights considerations. These are the subject of an ongoing study by me that will result in a report during late 2025.

Instrumentalisation refers to the abusive practice whereby certain states support or facilitate the irregular movement of refugees and migrants into other states to destabilise or pressure them. This practice is to be deplored. However, the legitimate enhancement of security on our frontiers must not – and need not – be at the expense of respect for such fundamental principles of international law as respecting the right to apply for asylum and the prohibition on refoulement. I laid out my position on these matters in three third-party interventions at the European Court of Human Rights and have addressed concerns about this with several member states.

To conclude my remarks on migration I observe how it is arguably the context in which we see the most widespread retreat from the rule of law across Europe.

Turning to artificial intelligence, I consider this rapidly evolving technology to be the potential vehicle for a vast and welcome transformation of our societies. But its application often also carries great risk for human wellbeing. This is the context for my welcome of the opening for signature of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. This ground-breaking human rights-based instrument will be an important framework of reference for oversight of AI world-wide.

It will be imperative for provisions of the Convention to be reflected in national regulatory and oversight systems. I consider the European Union's AI Act to serve as a notable achievement that offers a partial model for such oversight. Furthermore, the Council of Europe's tool for the human rights-testing of technology, HUDERIA, is a ground-breaking initiative deserving of wide support.

Beyond existing treaty and regulation commitments attention should now turn also to strengthened oversight of the private sector as well as in security and defence contexts.

I will continue to very closely follow AI developments.

Beyond these two sectors, other great issues with which I intend to increasingly engage are the right to a healthy environment and the levels of poverty our societies.

My third priority area is the defence of the human rights of the most marginalised in our societies. That is why I have devoted so much time and attention to the situation of the Roma and Traveller communities – some 12 million people in our member states and whose human rights are widely and often systematically violated. Patterns of hate and racism are matched by extreme discrimination and social exclusion.

I have visited the communities in multiple countries to hear from them and better understand their situations. In 2025, I will publish a large-scale output that will focus on supporting the empowerment of Roma women and girls. I will also continue to offer focused advice to specific member states.

While maintaining a strong commitment for the human rights of Roma and Travellers I will, in the coming period, engage the situation of other groups that are marginalised in our societies.

My fourth and final priority is the defence of human rights defenders. I am greatly troubled at the plight of defenders in multiple countries and regarding a deterioration in the climate within which they – including activists, independent journalists and others – seek to operate. Their safety and wellbeing are a bell-weather for the health of our democracies, and, by that measure, we face serious challenges. I have intervened on behalf of human rights defenders to national governments, at the European Court of Human Rights and I have visited them in prison. I observe that activists face diverse degrees of pressure depending on the issues on which they work. LGBTI and women's rights activists have continued to face particular challenges during the past year. And a very wide range of civil society activists have been negatively impacted by laws that problematically address issues of foreign funding.

Beyond specific priorities I have found it necessary during the past year to engage systemic concerns such as threats to the operation of national human rights institutions and equality bodies, funding for civil society, challenges to our human rights and rule-based systems and the rise in levels of disinformation. I have also engaged with the human rights situation in a number of specific countries, offering recommendations and other commentary as appropriate (much of which can be accessed on my website).

To the extent possible I have adopted a gendered approach to my activities, recognising the distinct experience of women and men. To help me in this regard the staff who support my mandate have undertaken tailored gender mainstreaming training. I also seek to integrate the views of young people in my work, for which purpose I am developing structured consultation methods.

In terms of methodologies, I have sought to stay nimble and quick to engage, especially by being in the field to the extent possible. I have concentrated less on large-scale reports than on targeted and focused real-time interventions. I have also invested in the maintenance and furtherance of partnerships. I have sought to deepen ties and engagement with the other Council of Europe institutions, as well as with the European Union, the United Nations, the OSCE, with national human rights institutions and equality bodies, as well as with civil society, academia and the private sector.

Looking to the future, while I am well aware of the extent of the challenge that we all face, nevertheless I believe that the mandate of Commissioner for Human Rights can help navigate a way forward. I remain hopeful that we, together, can bring human rights back from the precipice. By moving with resolution and caution, we can protect what has been achieved and consolidate it for the future.

Let the final words be those of Hessel,

Je vous souhaite à tous, à chacun d'entre vous, d'avoir votre motif d'indignation. C'est précieux. Quand quelque chose vous indigne comme j'ai été indigné par le nazisme, alors on devient militant, fort, engagé. On rejoint ce courant de l'histoire et le grand courant de l'histoire doit se poursuivre grâce à chacun. Et ce courant va vers plus de justice, plus de liberté mais pas cette liberté incontrôlée du renard dans le poulailler. Ces droits, dont la Déclaration universelle a rédigé le programme en 1948, sont universels. Si vous rencontrez quelqu'un qui n'en bénéficie pas, plaignez-le, aidez-le à les conquérir.

Michael O'Flaherty

1 COUNTRY FOCUS

Introduction

In the course of 2024, Commissioner O'Flaherty, visited a number of countries focusing on specific human rights issues requiring particular attention. Apart from the impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights, these issues included mainly the human rights of Roma and Travellers, and of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, . The Commissioner also sent letters to raise certain human rights concerns with the authorities responsible for addressing them. In addition to the two areas mentioned above, these letters focused on freedom of association; the right to peaceful assembly; freedom of expression and media freedom; the human rights of LGBTI people and the situation of human rights defenders. In some cases, the Commissioner addressed human rights situations that required urgent attention through statements. All along 2024, the Commissioner also pursued his dialogue with member States of the Council of Europe on these and other human rights issues in one-on-one meetings with authorities both in Strasbourg and abroad.

1.1 Visits

Ukraine

From 23 to 25 April, the Commissioner visited Ukraine (Kyiv) for the first time during his mandate. He focused on the human rights of Ukrainian children transferred to Russia and Belarus and those residing in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The Commissioner deplored human rights abuses under Russia's occupation and in Russia, including torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees. He welcomed the Council of Europe's Register of Damage for Ukraine and stated that a future compensation mechanism should provide redress to all victims of Russia's aggression. He noted the urgency to rebuild Ukraine's infrastructure, including destroyed schools.

Slovak Republic

From 8 to 12 July, the Commissioner visited the Slovak Republic, primarily focusing on the human rights of Roma. He highlighted the poor living conditions of some marginalised Roma communities, and discrimination in healthcare, including the urgent need to compensate Roma women victims of forced sterilisation. He also stressed the need to tackle antigypsyism and discrimination more widely, including in the area of education and in policing practices. Beyond the human rights situation of Roma, he expressed regret that the act on replacing public broadcaster with a new entity had been adopted despite his earlier concerns, and emphasised that the proposed bill on NGO registration should fully conform to human rights standards.

Poland

The Commissioner visited Poland from 16-18 September focusing on the human rights situation at the border with Belarus. While acknowledging the challenges of instrumentalisation of migration, he stressed that the practice of summary returns of persons across the border, without an individual assessment exposes them to the risk of serious violations of the rights protected by the ECHR. He highlighted the need to end such returns, creating structures for meaningful dialogue with expert civil society organisations, and improve legal and humanitarian access to the buffer zone. He recommended considering the establishment of an independent human rights monitoring at the border and repealing legislation exempting border agents from criminal liability in certain cases.

Finland

From 23 to 26 September, the Commissioner carried out a visit to Finland, focusing on the human rights situation of Roma and issues related to migration and asylum. He visited several places of relevance, including a border crossing point, and met with authorities and stakeholders. While recognising the serious challenges faced by Finland due to instrumentalisation of migration by a neighbouring state, the Commissioner stressed that border control should not come at the expense of human rights. On Roma, the Commissioner commended Finland's achievements in human rights, but was also informed of concerns regarding discrimination and rising racism, among others.

Ireland

From 7 – 11 October, the Commissioner carried out a visit to Ireland, focusing on the human rights of Travellers and Roma. In addition to meeting with government representatives, the Oireachtas, independent human rights

structures, Traveller and Roma communities and civil society, the Commissioner visited halting sites in Dublin and Limerick and participated in a ceremony dedicated to the memory of Travellers, including children, who had died of suicide. Following the visit, he called for sustained attention across government to address the persistent anti-Traveller racism and discrimination in Irish society, and encouraged further steps to improve access to education and healthcare.

Türkiye
From 4 to 8 November, the Commissioner carried out a contact mission to Türkiye, focusing on a broad range of human rights issues including the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the situation of migrants and refugees and the rights of the Roma communities.

1.2 Letters and statements

Azerbaijan
Letter to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, on the situation of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists imprisoned for their legitimate work or for expressing dissenting or critical opinions and asking for their release, published on 18 November.

Cyprus
Letter to the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, on the situation of migrant and asylum-seeking people stranded in the buffer zone in conditions exposing them to significant risks of violation their human rights, and on reports of boats carrying migrants being prevented from disembarking in Cyprus and returned without access to asylum procedures published on 31 October.

Czech Republic
Letters to the Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, and to the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, Markéta Pekarová Adamová, and the President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, Miloš Vystrčil on the law on compensation for victims of forced sterilisations, most of whom are Roma women, asking the authorities to extend the law for a period sufficient to ensure access to compensation for all victims and to address identified shortcomings to ensure a clear and consistent procedure, published on 11 December.

Finland
Letter to the Speaker of the Parliament of Finland Jussi Halla-aho, the Chair of the Administrative Committee Mauri Peltokangas, the Chair of the Constitutional Law Committee Heikki Vestman and the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Kimmo Kiljunen, expressing concern about the human rights compatibility of the draft Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration, which lays down conditions for the government to restrict the reception of applications for international protection on and in proximity of Finland's border and allows relevant authorities to refuse entry to a migrant and/or have them summarily removed, published on 17 June.

Georgia
Letter to the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, calling on Parliament to refrain from adopting the draft law "On transparency of foreign influence", which required civil society organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register with the Ministry of Justice and risked having a chilling effect on the work of media outlets and civil society organisations, published on 16 April.

Letter to the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, calling on Parliament to refrain from adopting the draft law "On protecting family values and minors", which provides a legal footing for discrimination against LGBTI people and perpetuates the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTI people, published on 10 September.

Statement on the right of peaceful assembly in Georgia, expressing concern about reports of disproportionate use of force by the police against predominantly peaceful demonstrators and journalists covering protests in Georgia and calling on the authorities to fulfil their obligations in this area, published on 4 December.

Italy
Letter to the President of the Senate of Italy, Ignazio La Russa, in relation to draft legislation on public security (Bill 1236) pending before the Senate, raising concerns about potential risks of arbitrary and disproportionate application of penalties and restrictions to the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly, published on 20 December.

Poland
Letters to Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, and Marshal of the Polish Senate, Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska, concerning the human rights situation on the border with Belarus, expressing concern about the reported continuing practice of summary returns of persons across that border, the human rights consequences of the so-called buffer zone established along parts of it, and about a draft law exempting from criminal liability some state agents deployed in border areas under certain conditions and in situations of urgency, published on 23 July.

Slovak Republic
Letter to the Deputy Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Peter Žiga and to the Chair of the Constitutional Law Committee, Miroslav Čellár; the Chair of the Public Law and Regional Development Committee, Michal Šipoš; the Chair of the Human Rights and National Minorities Committee, Lucia Plaváková; and Chair of the Culture and Media Committee, Roman Michelko, addressing a draft law on registration of non-profit organisations (with concerns relating to appropriate procedural safeguards, failure to sufficiently meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality and the chilling effect created by the registration and labelling of 'organisations with foreign support') and a draft law on the public broadcaster (highlighting the importance of legislative frameworks that ensure the independence of public service media from government control, in the context of the replacement of the current public service broadcaster with a new entity), published on 14 May.

United Kingdom
Statement about the adoption by the UK Parliament of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, expressing concern that it prevented individuals faced with removal to Rwanda from accessing remedies for potential violations of the absolute prohibition of refoulement, while also significantly excluding the ability of UK courts to fully and independently scrutinise the issues brought before them, published on 23 April

1.3 Meetings with authorities

Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia

On 17 May, in the margins of the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan. They discussed a number of human rights issues of common interest, including violence against women and domestic violence.

Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia

On 17 May, in the margins of the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, Tanja Fajon. They discussed a number of human rights issues of common interest, including the situation of Ukrainian children, freedom of expression, environment and human rights and artificial intelligence .

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

On 17 May, in the margins of the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Iryna Borovets. They discussed respective priorities in the field of human rights, including the situation of Ukrainian children transferred to Russia and Belarus.

Meeting with the Minister for European Affairs and Defence of Ireland

On 17 May, in the margins of the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the Minister for European Affairs and Defence of Ireland, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, exchanging on several issues, including the impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights and antisemitism.

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechia

On 17 May, in the margins of the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechia, Jan Marian. They discussed respective priorities in the field of human rights, including the issue of Ukrainian children transferred to Russia and Belarus.

Meeting with the Minister of Justice of Poland,

On 5 September, in the margins of the Informal conference of the Ministers of Justice in Vilnius, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Justice of Poland, Adam Bodnar. The discussion covered a number of human rights issues, including matters related to the rule of law.

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection of the Republic of Cyprus

On 6 September, the Commissioner had an online meeting with the Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection of Cyprus, Nicholas A. Ioannides. Their exchange focused on the situation of the migrant and asylum-seeking people stranded in the buffer zone and allegations of pushbacks at sea.

Meeting with the Head of Department for Human Rights and Minority Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria

On 28 October, the Commissioner met with the Head of Department for Human Rights and Minority Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Ambassador Ulrike Butschek. Their exchange focused on the Commissioner's priorities and current human rights challenges across the continent.

Meeting with the Minister for Gender Equality and Diversity, Minister of Defence, and Minister for Mobility and Public Works of Luxembourg,

On 21 November, the Commissioner met with the Minister for Gender Equality and Diversity, Minister of Defence, and Minister for Mobility and Public Works of Luxembourg, Yuriko Backes. The discussions covered a number of areas of common interest, including human rights issues arising from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on Council of Europe member states and current challenges to multilateralism.

Meeting with the President of the Interministerial Committee for Human Rights, Italy

On 22 November, the Commissioner met with the President of the Italian Interministerial Committee for Human Rights, Giovanni Battista Iannuzzi. Topics of discussion included human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and the role of NHRIs at national level.

Meeting with the Director General of Public Administration and Democratic Rule of Law of the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands

On 22 November, the Commissioner met with the Director General of Public Administration and Democratic Rule of Law of the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands, Arne van Hout. They discussed human rights issues of common interest, including combating discrimination and upholding freedom of assembly.

Meeting with the Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic

On 5 December, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, Tomáš Drucker. Among other things, they discussed the situation of Roma, including efforts to address the segregation of Roma children in education, early-age education, and the importance of Holocaust remembrance and teaching of Roma culture.

Meeting with the Minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality, prevention of violence against women and economic and political empowerment of women of Serbia

On 6 December, the Commissioner met with the Minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality, prevention of violence against women and economic and political empowerment of women of Serbia, Tatjana Macura. They exchanged on current challenges to women's rights and gender equality in Serbia and on the need for better protection of Roma women.

Meeting with the President of the Republic of Bulgaria

On 9 December, the Commissioner had an exchange in Strasbourg with the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev. The discussions focused, among other things, on the protection of human rights in challenging times.

2 THEMATIC FOCUS

Introduction

Reflecting the priorities highlighted by the Commissioner on taking up his mandate, the following section contains a brief description of the main activities of the Commissioner organised by thematic areas. These activities include the publication of thematic documents, the organisation of events, the participation in conferences as well as meetings with a wide range of partners.

2.1 Impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights

From the start of his mandate, the Commissioner pledged to stand up for the human rights of the people of Ukraine. Throughout the year, he responded to the human rights consequences of the armed aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. His priorities included keeping the plight of Ukrainian children relocated to Russia at the top of the international political agenda; defending the human rights of people living in the temporarily occupied territories, including Crimea; addressing Ukraine's immediate humanitarian needs; maintaining a strong focus on criminal accountability; delivering victim-centred justice; and mainstreaming human rights in all peace and reconstruction efforts and initiatives.

The Commissioner's first visit in 2024 was to Ukraine (see *Country focus)* and after that, his engagement included direct exchanges with Ukrainian authorities, international organisations, as well as addressing specific human rights issues in statements and speeches.

- On 15 May, the Commissioner met with Markiyan Kliuchkovskyi, Executive Director of the Council of Europe Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, in The Hague. They discussed issues of accountability for international crimes in Ukraine and restorative justice.

- On 26 June, the Commissioner gave a speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) joint debate on the legal and human rights aspects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

- On the same day, the Commissioner met with the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), Dmytro Lubinets. They exchanged on their respective priorities and agreed on continuing cooperation.

- On 26 June, the Commissioner also met with a delegation of Ukrainian journalists, civil society activists and victims of human rights violations to hear their testimonies on the situation of Ukrainian journalists detained in Russia.

- On 3 July, the Commissioner delivered the opening remarks at the side event "Protecting social rights in times of war in Ukraine" which was organised in Vilnius on the occasion of the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Minister (*see Thematic focus – Social rights*).

- On 9 July, the Commissioner issued a statement condemning Russia's deadly missile attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine the day before, including the bombing of Okhmatdyt, Ukraine's largest children's hospital.

- On 5 September in Vilnius, the Commissioner attended the informal conference of the Ministers of Justice of the member states of the Council of Europe held under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which aimed to address critical issues in international criminal justice related to accountability for international crimes committed in and against Ukraine. The Commissioner delivered a speech on crime prosecution and enforcement of judgments.

- On the margins of the Informal conference of the Ministers of Justice the Commissioner met with the Minister of Justice of Lithuania, Ewelina Dobrowolska. They discussed the development prospects of a Special Tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine and highlighted the importance of supporting Ukraine, including through humanitarian assistance.

- On 1 October in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with a group of relatives of Ukrainian civilians and servicemen missing or detained in Russia, accompanied by the Chairperson of Ukraine's PACE delegation, Maria Mezentseva-Fedorenko. He stressed that every effort must be made to locate and return all Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees, including children, who are missing or held in Russian captivity, and to hold those responsible for serious human rights abuses committed against them accountable.

- On 2 October in Strasbourg, the Commissioner met with the First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Nariman Dzhelyal, released from Russian captivity earlier in the year. Noting that many more remained unlawfully detained in Crimea and in Russia, the Commissioner called for all unlawfully detained persons to be exonerated and released.

- During his exchange with the Committee of Ministers' Deputies on 19 November marking 1000 days since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Commissioner drew attention to the need to continue to stand up for the human rights of Ukrainian people, including the internally displaced people and the returnees who face housing shortages and other social challenges, the prisoners held by Russian forces, either in Ukraine or in Russia and the children who were taken to Russia.

- On 5 December, the Commissioner delivered a videorecorded speech at the International Human Rights Forum "Decade 2014 – 2024. Reclaiming Human Rights. Preserving Democracy", organised in Kyiv by Ukraine's Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights.

2.2 Human rights of Roma and Travellers

In 2024, the Commissioner 's work on the human rights of Roma and Travellers was a priority and a significant part of his agenda was devoted to bringing the challenges they face to the forefront of human rights discussions. He focused in particular on antigypsyism; on the need to work with Roma people to design and adequately implement rights-based policies; on the need to address the lack of data on the situation of Roma and on promoting and celebrating Roma culture. The Commissioner specifically expressed his commitment to a targeted approach in supporting Roma women and girls**.**

The Commissioner's work in this area included dedicated country visits to the Slovak Republic, Finland and Ireland, (with the relative Memoranda published in early 2025) and letters to the Prime Minister and to the Parliament of the Czech Republic (see *Country focus*). Also, while in Thessaloniki in June, the Commissioner engaged with local Roma communities living on the outskirts of the city, visiting the 'Agia Sofia' and Dendropotamos neighbourhoods and meeting a group of Roma women and girls. In addition to this country-specific dimension, his engagement on the human rights of Roma and Travellers included the following:

- In a statement issued on 5 April, ahead of International Roma Day, the Commissioner stated that the protection of the human rights of Roma and Travellers must become a top priority in Council of Europe member states, underlining that the lived experiences of discrimination and the scale of human rights violations faced by Roma and Travellers are shocking.

- On 8 April, the Commissioner celebrated International Roma Day organised at the Council of Europe by calling for respect for the dignity of Roma people and stressed the importance of collaborating with young people.

- On 18 June, the Commissioner delivered a speech at the Journalism Excellence Awards Ceremony "Ethical media reporting on Roma and combating racism and antigypsyism through the media" organised under the EU-CoE Joint Programme EQUIROM.

- On 1 August, ahead of the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, the Commissioner addressed a video message to the international conference "My testimony is for young people - Passing on Memory for the Future of Holocaust Remembrance and Education" organised in Krakow on 31 July and 1 August 2024, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of 2 August 1944. The Commissioner stressed the importance of delivering on "never again" and underlined that remembering also means recognising antigypsyism today.

- On 30 August, the Commissioner met online with Đorđe Jovanović, President of the European Roma Rights Centre. They exchanged on current human rights challenges faced by Roma and Travellers across Europe. The Commissioner stated his intention to work closely with Roma-led civil society organisations.

- On 9 and 10 September, the Commissioner convened a consultation meeting in Strasbourg with experts working on the human rights of Roma and Travellers. The discussions addressed the key challenges faced by Roma and Travellers across Europe and explored how to best advance the protection of their human rights, including by confronting inequality, antigypsyism and exclusion.

- On 18 September, the Commissioner addressed a video message to the Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process, preceding the Berlin Process Summit 2024. He stressed the need to join forces across countries and to work in partnership with Roma, in particular Roma women and youth, to bring about real and meaningful change.

- On 10 December, the Commissioner recorded a video message on the occasion of the launching of the European Working Group on Antigypsyism and Transitional Justice for Roma, initiated within the project "Reclaiming our Past, Rebuilding our Future: New Approaches to Combating Antigypsyism" (the Jekhipe project). With patterns of discrimination and hatred perpetrated today against Roma going back into

history, the Commissioner stressed the importance of delivering justice for past human rights violations and welcomed the establishment of the working group. He specifically emphasised the need to design transitional justice programmes that are local and country-specific and to place civil society at their heart.

2.3 Human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

In 2024, the Commissioner's engagement on the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants was intensive, with specific attention paid to systematic violations at borders, including in response to the phenomenon of instrumentalization of migration and to externalisation (whereby States seek to have aspects of their own responsibilities for asylum procedures or border control managed by other States). The Commissioner made several country-specific interventions related to these issues, including visits to Finland and Poland dealing with the issue of protecting rights at borders, as well as to Ireland on the provision of accommodation to international protection applicants. He also wrote letters to Cyprus, Finland and Poland on these issues and issued a statement on the Rwanda Bill in the United Kingdom (see *Country focus*). Furthermore, the Commissioner submitted written observations to the European Court of Human Rights in three cases against Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, dealing with allegations of summary returns of persons at these states' borders with Belarus (see *System of the European Convention on Human Rights*). In addition, to these country-specific interventions, the Commissioner engaged on the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the following manner:

- On 4 April, the Commissioner met with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, David Best exchanging about their respective mandates and complementarity of activities.

- He also met with key partners during his mission to Geneva from 27 to 30 May, including the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection of UNHCR, Ruvendrini Menikdwela, and the Deputy Director General for Management and Reform of the International Organisation for Migration (see *Co-operation with European and international organisations).*

- On 20 June, on the occasion of World Refugee Day, the Commissioner highlighted that a great many people reaching our shores and crossing our borders are in search of safety from war and persecution.

- In addition, on 5 September, the Commissioner reacted to recent shipwrecks in the English Channel and the Mediterranean, noting that Council of Europe member states should protect the human rights of refugees and migrants at sea.

- On 10 September, the Commissioner participated in the 2nd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling. In his speech, he noted the importance of further cooperation and coordination, whilst being aware of the risks that anti-smuggling work may entail.

- On 1 October, the Commissioner held an exchange with the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He pointed to five ways to put human rights back at the heart of migration and border policies.

- On that same day, the Commissioner also participated in a joint plenary debate of the Parliamentary Assembly, which focused on two reports on missing migrants and a shared European approach to address smuggling, respectively. The Commissioner also addressed the growing tendency to repudiate law and the securitisation of border policy.

- On 19 November, during his exchange with the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, the Commissioner expressed his concern about the securitisation of borders in the context of instrumentalisation of migration by third states, which may lead to strategies that are at odds with human rights commitments.

- On 10 December, the Commissioner published a statement following some member states suspending the processing of asylum claims of Syrians and announcing plans for returns to Syria, in view of the fall of the Assad regime. Among other things, he emphasised the need to uphold the principle of non-refoulement.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human rights

Throughout 2024, the Commissioner raised the need for human rights compliant artificial intelligence and the importance of effective human oversight, both in meetings with authorities and civil society actors. The issue was addressed in his speech at 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 17 May and during his exchange of views with Committee of Ministers on 19 June. In addition:

- At the European Law Institute Annual Conference 2024 held in Dublin on 10 October, the Commissioner stressed that oversight of artificial intelligence does not have to come at the expense of innovation.

- At the Lisbon Web Summit on 12 November, he spoke on the topic of "Algorithms of injustice: Human rights in the digital age" stressing the importance of good regulation to ensure effective oversight and transparency. During the Web Summit, the Commissioner met with the co-chair of the Oversight Board, Pamela San Martin to discuss the importance of self-regulation of tech companies alongside external regulation.

- During his exchange with the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society on 4 December, the Commissioner addressed the impact of artificial intelligence on a free, reliable and diverse media.

- In his opening video address to the "Bled Conference on the Effectiveness of Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs in Tackling Contemporary Challenges", organised by the Ombudsman Institution of Slovenia on 5 December, the Commissioner invited participants to consider their potential role ensuring human rights oversight in the deployment of artificial intelligence.

2.5 Environment and human rights

In 2024, the Commissioner focussed on promoting the recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, on encouraging respect for human rights standards with regard to environmental protection and climate change, and on supporting the work of environmental human rights defenders.

- On 21 June, the Commissioner met in Paris with Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, to discuss their potential for cooperation.

- On 31 May, the Commissioner met with the laureates of *the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders,* France's support programme for human rights defenders from around the world and stressed the importance of listening and learning from the experiences of human rights defenders about the growing threats faced in their work on the environment.

- On 29 October, the Commissioner attended the 11th Inter-mechanisms meeting of institutional mandate-holders for the protection of human rights defenders in Paris. The meeting provided a key platform to engage in strategic discussions under Chatham House rules, on concrete ways to enhance the protection of environmental defenders through cooperation and complementary actions.

- In his speech at the high-level event celebrating 25th Anniversary of the Institution, the Commissioner identified six critical challenges threatening human rights and underlined the need to install respect for humanity at the heart of engagement with, for example, the climate crisis.

2.6 Women's rights and gender equality

In 2024, the Commissioner set out his intention to mainstream gender throughout his priorities, the importance of taking an intersectional approach, his commitment to addressing violence against women, and the need for inter-institutional cooperation in this area.

- On 20 November, the Commissioner participated in an exchange of views with the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission.

- On the same day, the Commissioner met with GREVIO President Andriana Kostopoulou to discuss concerns regarding violence against women and domestic violence in the Council of Europe region, and opportunities to promote the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

2.7 Children's rights and rights of young people

In 2024, the Commissioner addressed the special human rights concerns of children and young people, recognising the importance of issues such as access to rights and the inadequate representation of young people's concerns and interests in democratic processes. The Commissioner stressed his commitment to better understand the concerns of young people and work with them to build a future where everyone can enjoy their human rights.

- On 14 May, the Commissioner exchanged views with representatives of national youth councils and international youth organisations at 'Confidence in tomorrow' youth event, organised as part of the celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe. Topics discussed included the access of young people to housing, education, employment, and health services, as well as concerns regarding participation and civic spaces for young people.

- On 21 May, the Commissioner addressed a video message to the launch event of the Spanish version of the report on *Children, Youth and the Death Penalty* published by the International Commission against the Death Penalty. Noting the importance of the global struggle against the death penalty and its achievements in this area, he stressed the need to continue to invest in the effective abolition of the death penalty within the Council of Europe and beyond, including against children.

- On 19 June, the Commissioner met with Nina Grmuša, the newly elected Chair and Margo Vorykhava, the newly elected Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth to discuss issues of common concern, including those related to access to rights and challenges related to intersectional forms of discrimination.

2.8 Human rights of LGBTI people

In 2024, the Commissioner pledged to keep challenges faced by LGBTI people as a priority in his role, to work with and stand up for LGBTI people and to call out abuses. He highlighted the increase in discrimination, harassment, violent attacks, disinformation and gender identity denial; the political instrumentalisation of, in particular, trans people; and the chilling effect of so-called foreign funding laws, already adopted in a number of member states, and their impact on LGBTI organisations in particular. He also underlined the importance of European strategies in countering the current backsliding against the human rights of LGBTI people, which is the result of well-resourced anti-rights efforts.

The Commissioner made a number of country-specific interventions in this realm, sending a letter asking the Georgian Parliament to refrain from adopting the draft law "On protecting family values and minors" (*see Country focus*) and expressing concern about the adoption by the Bulgarian Parliament of legislation banning so-called LGBTI "propaganda" in schools. In addition:

- On 15 May, the Commissioner participated in the IDAHOT+ Forum 2024 in The Hague, the Netherlands. In his speech, given at the Opening Plenary Session, he referred to widespread discrimination, harassment,

hate and violence faced by LGBTI people, the instrumentalisation of trans and intersex people in politics, and urged against a "business as usual" approach.

- During the Forum, the Commissioner also participated in the informal ministerial meeting of ministers responsible for LGBTIQ+ equality policies, and met with numerous stakeholders, including government officials and activists.

- On 17 May, the Commissioner marked International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOT) by visiting the Amsterdam Rainbow Dress at the Council of Europe, jointly organised by the Netherlands, Belgium, Estonia and Luxembourg, in the margins of the CM formal session.

- On 28 June, the Commissioner delivered a speech at the closing session of the EuroPride 2024 Human Rights Conference in Thessaloniki (Greece) expressing his alarm at the accounts he had heard, during the first months of his mandate, and urging all to remain hopeful, calling on the courage, tenacity and perseverance of the LGBTI communities.

- In the margins of the Conference, the Commissioner met with the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas and MEP Marc Angel, as well as LGBTI human rights defenders participating in the event.

- On 4 December, the Commissioner delivered a keynote speech at a Conference on addressing violence and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women in Europe, organised by the PACE Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe in collaboration with the Council of Europe SOGIESC Unit.

- On 17 December, the Commissioner spoke at the Equal Rights Coalition Conference 2024 in Berlin, Germany. He highlighted the rising threats to the human rights of LGBTI people and members of civil society who work in the field.

2.9 Social rights

In 2024, the Commissioner noted that ongoing crises (including related to climate, management of migration, health, cost-of-living and conflicts) highlighted the importance of social rights for all. Emphasising the indivisibility of human rights, the Commissioner committed to standing up for the social rights architecture of the Council of Europe and stressed the common challenges for the protection of human rights and social rights for everyone, including the most vulnerable.

- On 3 July, the Commissioner delivered the opening remarks at the side event "Protecting social rights in times of war in Ukraine" organised in Vilnius on the occasion of the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Minister. He stressed that social rights could help counter Russia's war on human rights in Ukraine and suggested that firmly embedding human rights, including social rights, in the conflict response and in all peace and reconstruction processes would make for fairer and more durable outcomes.

- On 4 July, he delivered the introductory speech at the High-Level Conference that aimed at taking stock of the implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration with respect to social rights and social justice. He called on member states to ratify and extend their commitments under the Revised European Social Charter, support the work of the European Committee of Social Rights, and embed human rights in social policies, including by engaging the expertise of national human rights structures in related policymaking.

- On 15 October, the Commissioner held an exchange of views with the European Committee of Social Rights where he raised these issues again.

2.10 Freedom of association and freedom of assembly

In 2024, the Commissioner stressed that the rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, are a cornerstone of democratic society. He reminded member states that any restrictions on these rights must be prescribed by law, necessary, proportionate, non-discriminatory, and subject to independent judicial review.

The Commissioner made country-specific interventions in relation to legislative developments in Georgia, Slovak Republic and Italy and policing of demonstrations in Georgia (see *Country focus*). On 30 August, the Commissioner submitted his first third-party intervention since the start of his mandate in a case concerning freedom of expression and freedom of association in Hungary (see *System of the European Convention on Human Rights*).

2.11 Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists

In 2024, the Commissioner addressed challenges faced by journalists across Europe including the lack of accountability for crimes committed against journalists, government repression and the use of criminal charges and abusive lawsuits to stifle independent reporting. He further emphasised that the defence of press freedom is inextricably linked to the preservation of democracy. In addition to his country-specific work, which in the reference period included his visit to Slovakia (see *Country focus*), the Commissioner engaged with issues relating to freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists in the following manner:

- On 2 May for World Press Freedom Day 2024, the Commissioner reaffirmed the importance of a free and independent press as a public good, serving the public interest, pledging to play his part in ensuring that journalists can work freely and safely.

- On 19 June, the Commissioner congratulated Reporters Without Borders Germany on 30 years of defending press freedom, emphasising that journalists are at risk of harm or death when reporting on events, and that they require protection and assistance.

- On 1 November, the Commissioner called on member states to end impunity for crimes against journalists. He stressed that the lack of justice for murdered journalists across Europe is a troubling sign of the dangers facing the press.

- On 4 December, the Commissioner participated in an exchange of views with the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI). In his speech, he underlined the importance of maintaining free, reliable and diverse media to tackle current challenges, such as the impact of artificial intelligence and disinformation, and of protecting journalists.

2.12 Combating racism and intolerance

In 2024, the Commissioner addressed a broad range of issues pertaining to the fight against racism and intolerance, paying special attention to the rise of antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe, the need to combat antigypsyism and the importance of interfaith dialogue.

- On 12 April, the Commissioner met with the Chairperson of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, Barbara G. Reynolds, with discussions centred on the need to address Afrophobia across the Council of Europe area.

- On 18 June, the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, the Commissioner called for taking inspiration from young people's power to create positive change and say no to hate.

- On 25 June, the Commissioner met with representatives of the French youth initiative *Salam, Shalom, Salut (3S)* in Strasbourg to support their work and to gather insights on their anti-racism and anti-discrimination activities.

- On 25 June, the Commissioner met with the representative of the Conference of European Rabbis in the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe, Rabbi Mendel Samama and discussed the need to strengthen combating antisemitism and other forms of intolerance.

- The Commissioner had an exchange of views with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on 2 July and on 17 October, he addressed ECRI's annual seminar with Equality Bodies on racism, intolerance, and inequalities.

- On 23 October the Commissioner had meetings in Dublin with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities of Ireland.

- On 13 November in Lisbon, he exchanged with the Deputy Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Ambassador António de Almeida-Ribeiro.

2.13 Transitional justice

In 2024, the Commissioner addressed the importance of remembrance, of honouring the victims, of countering the denial of genocide and the glorification of those who perpetrated it, and of acting to prevent gross human rights violations in the future.

- On 24 May, the Commissioner welcomed the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution designating 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, stressing that genocide denial and the glorification of the perpetrators in some countries of the region of the former Yugoslavia threaten the rule of law, peace and social cohesion.

- On 10 July, the Commissioner published a video statement for the first International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.

- On 29 August, for the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the Commissioner published a joint statement together with the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and the Representatives of Indonesia and Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The statement expressed solidarity with victims of enforced disappearances and the human rights defenders who support them and observed that many victims still face unbearable challenges and impunity prevails.

2.14 Human Rights and sport

On 21 June, the Commissioner carried out a mission to Paris to engage with the City of Paris, the French National Consultative Human Rights Commission (CNCDH) and civil society actors on the human rights impact of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. On 26 June, the Commissioner expressed pride in being part of the Olympic Torch's journey as it passed through Strasbourg and that it aptly illustrated the values of inclusion and non-discrimination shared by the Olympics and human rights. On 29 August, ahead of the opening of the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, the Commissioner reiterated the power of inclusion and participation in challenging stereotypes and effecting positive change in society.

3 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Supporting the essential work of human rights defenders was an important priority for the Commissioner in 2024. The Commissioner continued to pay close attention to the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states, using the range of tools at his disposal. He underlined that undue restrictions on civil society and human rights defenders are often signs of a broader democratic backsliding, which provides the context for further human rights violations.

One of the ways in which the Commissioner intends to support human rights defenders and inform his work on protecting them against non-human rights compliant policies and practices, is through the organisation of Round Tables. On 21 and 22 November, the Commissioner organised his first such round-table with more than 30 human rights defenders from across the Council of Europe to hear their concerns about current trends and challenges. Human rights defenders informed the Commissioner about increased hostility by state and non-state actors. They also face growing financial insecurity amid efforts to delegitimise and defund civil society organisations, while at the same time having to find more resources to defend themselves against disinformation and defamation. Human rights defenders, especially young people, are often excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making processes as these are increasingly taking place through emergency procedures. The Round Table also served as an opportunity for human rights defenders to exchange with the Commissioner on how to strengthen their protection and enhance co-operation between them and the Commissioner's Office.

In addition, the Commissioner addressed the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states through a number of country-specific interventions, including a letter to the President of Azerbaijan (see *Country focus)*, and through exchanges and meetings with a wide range of partners, which include the following:

- On 8 April, in his address to the General Assembly of the Council of Europe's Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGO), the Commissioner pledged to prioritise the defence of civil society and support for human rights defenders during his mandate.

- On 25 June, in a speech to the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) Conference on the Protection and Promotion of Civil Society Space in Europe, the Commissioner highlighted the responsibility to stand up for civil society under great pressure across the continent.

- On 31 May, the Commissioner met with the laureates of *the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders,* France's support programme for human rights defenders from around the world, and discussed the growing threats against human rights defenders working with women, indigenous groups and minorities, and on the environment.

- On 21 June, the Commissioner met in Paris with Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, to discuss their potential for cooperation.

- On 15 July, on the 15th anniversary of her murder, the Commissioner honoured the memory of Natalya Estemirova, a human rights defender from Chechnya, Russia.

- In addition, on 30 September, the Commissioner attended the 2024 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize ceremony, highlighting the importance of this prize as a signal of the support by the Parliamentary Assembly to human rights defenders.

- On 23 and 24 October, the Commissioner attended Frontline Defenders' Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders where he participated in a panel discussion with other international mandate holders about the work of their respective institutions, collaboration opportunities and the support those mandates can provide to the work of human rights defenders. The Commissioner also held individual meetings with human rights defenders from different countries.

- On 29 October, the Commissioner attended the 11th Inter-mechanisms meeting of institutional mandate-holders for the protection of human rights defenders (see *Thematic focus)*.

4 CO-OPERATION WITH NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STRUCTURES

Dialogue and close partnership with national human rights structures (NHRSs) was paramount for the Commissioner in 2024. The Commissioner recognised the NHRSs frontline role in realising human rights in people's daily lives and the value of effective co-operation between them and the Office, as well as with the Council of Europe as a whole. On 17 October the Commissioner convened a half-day exchange of views with heads and representatives of over 35 Equality Bodies, some of them also Ombudsman institutions and/or National Human Rights Institutions, from across the Council of Europe. Discussions focused on the challenges that the most marginalised people face in accessing national human rights structures and strategies deployed by Equality Bodies to reach out to them in order to improve their access to human rights and to redress for the human rights violations they suffer.

The Commissioner maintains close contacts with national human rights structures during his country visits and missions as well as in Strasbourg to discuss mainly national human rights developments. He also interacts with networks of national human rights structures, including EQUINET, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

In 2024 this work included the following:

- On 31 May, the Commissioner held an exchange with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the European Implementation Network (EIN), and Louise O'Keeffe, human rights defender for survivors of child sexual abuse and the applicant in the *O'Keeffe v. Ireland* judgment of the European Court of Human Rights.

- On 24 June, the Commissioner met with the Defender of Rights of France, Claire Hédon, with whom he discussed the cooperation between their respective institutions and the human rights challenges prevailing in France.

- On 27 June, the Commissioner met the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Levan Ioseliani, and his first Deputy, Tamar Gvaramadze, to exchange on their respective priorities and recent developments in the field of human rights in Georgia.

- On 1 July, the Commissioner met with the Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman) of Armenia, Anahit Manasyan. They discussed about their respective priorities and recent developments in the field of human rights in Armenia.

- On 18 October, the Commissioner met with Reinier Van Zutphen, President of the European Board of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) and Ombuds of The Netherlands, and Manuel Lezertua, Ombuds of the Basque Country.

- On 20 November, the Commissioner met with Louise Holck, chair of the board of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and Debbie Kohner, Secretary General of ENNHRI.

- In addition to meetings in Strasbourg, the Commissioner also exchanged with national human rights institutions and their networks during several missions, including with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, in Kyiv, with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions GANHRI in Geneva and the French Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme in Paris.

- Finally, on 21 October, the Commissioner delivered a keynote speech (online) on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia at the Conference "Ombuds Institutions / NHRIs amid Turbulent Times: Resilience and Challenges". On 5 December, the Commissioner delivered an Opening address (by video message) to the "Bled Conference on the Effectiveness of Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs in Tackling Contemporary Challenges", organised by the Ombudsman Institution of Slovenia on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.

5 SYSTEM OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2024, the Commissioner continued to consolidate the important role of the Institution in monitoring compliance with the Convention and the Court's judgments, as recognized in the Reykjavik Declaration. He exercised his right, pursuant to Article 36, paragraph 3 of the Convention, to submit written observations to the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Hungarian Helsinki Committee v. Hungary*, related to freedom of expression and freedom of association in Hungary. The case, lodged by a non-governmental organisation active, amongst others, in the area of human rights of migrants and currently pending before the European Court of Human Rights, relates to the introduction of Article 353/A of the Hungarian Criminal Code in June 2018, which criminalises "facilitating or supporting illegal migration" and can be applied to any humanitarian assistance to migrants or asylum seekers. The Commissioner also submitted his written comments to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania, H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia*, and *R.A. and Others v. Poland*. The cases relate to the alleged summary returns of asylum seekers by each of the three states across their borders with Belarus. The Grand Chamber held a hearing in each of the three cases on 12 February 2025, in which the Commissioner took part.

The Commissioner met with the President of the European Court of Human Rights Marko Bošnjak, on 3 October and met with his predecessor, Síofra O'Leary, on 3 April.

6 CO-OPERATION WITH EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

From the beginning of his mandate, the Commissioner has given a high level of priority to working together with other international organisations and seeking to strengthen synergies with them. Thus, on 21 November, during the high-level event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Institution of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commissioner hosted a high-level segment on collaboration among international organisations, with reflections from Olof Skoog, European Union Representative for Human Rights, Sirpa Rautio, Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, Tea Jaliashvili, Director Alternate, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and Peggy Hicks, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures, and Right to Development Division, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

From 27 to 28 May, the Commissioner travelled to Geneva to establish contact and strengthen cooperation with interlocutors from the United Nations and civil society. He presented his priorities and explored avenues for collaboration on the main human rights challenges in Europe. He met with the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ruvendrini Menikdiwela; the OHCHR Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada al-Nashif; the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Deputy Director General, Irena Sollorano; the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions GANHRI and the International Service for Human Rights.

On 25 June, the Commissioner met with Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Strasbourg. The discussion concerned a wide range of human rights issues, including Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the human rights of Roma, the protection of human rights defenders and migration. They both stressed the importance of joining forces to address the current human rights challenges. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also had an exchange with the Office of the Commissioner.

On 16 October, the Commissioner met with Nicolas Levrat, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in Strasbourg. They discussed shared concerns on issues relating to the protection of minorities across the region, as well as concrete ways to enhance cooperation and complementarity within their respective mandates, as part of a joint effort to ensure that diversity within societies is better accepted and celebrated.

On 2 September, in the margins of the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia, the Commissioner met with the Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, Sirpa Rautio.

On 13 November in Lisbon, the Commissioner met with Commissioner Marta Santos Pais from the International Commission against the Death Penalty. They discussed the need to continue to invest in the effective abolition of the death penalty in the Council of Europe's neighbouring regions and beyond.

7 OTHER MEETINGS

Ministerial Session of the Committee of Ministers

On 17 May, at the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner spoke about his role in following-up on the Reykjavik Declaration. In the margins of the Ministerial Session, the Commissioner had a number of bilateral meetings (see *Country focus).*

Exchange of views with Committee of Ministers

In his address to the Committee of Ministers on 19 June, the Commissioner delineated the strategic themes that would guide his tenure and the his aim to embed human rights in the great issues of the moment. He addressed the spillover of the conflict in the Middle East underscored the importance of cooperation, complementarity, and maintaining independence in his role.

Exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers

On 19 November, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers. The Commissioner's speech focused on Ukraine, the externalisation of consideration of asylum applications and the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on Council of Europe member states. On 19 November, during his exchange with the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, the Commissioner drew attention to the rise of the practice of antisemitism and of anti-Muslim hatred in Council of Member states and called on reinforced efforts to combat these outrageous unacceptable practices. The Commissioner also raised the issue of transfer of arms by at least some Council of Europe member states to the Middle East.

25th Anniversary of the Institution of the Commissioner for Human Rights

On 21 November the Commissioner hosted a high-level event to mark the institution's 25th anniversary. This event was part of the activities of Luxembourg's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Duirng the opening session, the Commissioner identified six critical challenges threatening human rights. The event continued with two high-level segments: the first reflected on the institution's impact, with contributions from former Commissioners Álvaro Gil-Robles, Nils Muižnieks, and Dunja Mijatović, and a message from Thomas Hammarberg. The second emphasised collaboration among international organisations (see *Co-operation with European and international organisations*).

Exchange of views with PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

On 16 April, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Meeting with a member of the Spanish Senate and of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

On 26 June, the Commissioner met with Spanish Senate and Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly member, Laura Castel. They discussed the recent developments relating to human rights in Spain.

Meeting with the PACE Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

On 24 June, the Commissioner had his first exchange with the PACE Monitoring Committee. He presented his priorities including standing up for the human rights of the people of Ukraine in face of the Russian aggression and for the human rights of the most marginalised people in our societies, and supporting human rights defenders.

Meeting with a member of the Greek Parliament and of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

On 24 June, the Commissioner met with a member of the Greek Parliament and of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Georgios Stamatis to discuss issues pertaining to human rights situation of the Roma communities in Greece.

Meeting with members of the Turkish National Assembly and of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

On 26 June, the Commissioner met with members of the Turkish National Assembly and of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Berdan Öztürk and Ayşegül Doğan. They discussed the execution of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights and the human rights situation in the country.

Enhancing the Resilience of Human Rights through Strategic Foresight

On 27 June, the Commissioner delivered a video message at the side-event on "Enhancing the Resilience of Human Rights through Strategic Foresight" organised by Finland on the margins of the Summer Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Meeting with members of the Bureau of the Unified European Left group at PACE

On 30 September, the Commissioner met with members of the Bureau of the Unified European Left group at PACE, Andrej Hunko, Paul Gavan, Laura Castel and Berdan Öztürk and discussed a range of human rights issues in Europe and more broadly.

Exchange of views with the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

On 14 October, the Commissioner participated in an exchange of views with the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG) at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. In his introductory speech, the Commissioner presented the local dimension of his work and pointed out the important role of local authorities in protecting human rights in Europe.

Exchange of views with the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM)

On 30 October, the Commissioner held an exchange of views with the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM), where he focused on the interplay of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, the indivisibility of human rights and the equal importance for democracy of civil and political and social rights. The Commissioner invited the Committee to count on his support in the delivery of its important mandate.

Informal exchange with Human Rights Ambassadors-at-Large

On 23 May, the Commissioner had an informal exchange with EU Ambassadors-at-Large for Human Rights from Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg Spain and Sweden. The discussions focused on current challenges to human rights and democracy.

Meeting with the Nordic-Baltic Ambassadors at the Council of Europe

On 3 December, the Commissioner had a lunch meeting with the permanent representatives at the Council of Europe of Nordic and Baltic states. The discussions focused the Commissioner's priorities and on some of the main current challenges to human rights and democracy. Cooperation and coordination with other Council of Europe bodies and with other multilateral organisations were also discussed.

4th edition of the high-level conference on the Global State of Human Rights

On 24 and 25 May, the Commissioner participated in the fourth edition of the high-level conference on the Global State of Human Rights, organised by the Global Campus of Human Rights and Right Livelihood in Venice. He spoke at the opening event on how to better protect human rights defenders and in a panel on defending human rights in times of war and conflict. On 25 May, while in Venice, the Commissioner visited the art exhibition in the Holy See Pavilion at the Biennale in Giudecca women's prison, describing it as a powerful demonstration of the essential relationship of the arts with human rights.

Bled Strategic Forum

From 1 to 3 September the Commissioner participated in the Young Bled Strategic Forum and in the 19th edition of the International Conference of the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia. At the Young Bled Forum, the Commissioner had an inspiring conversation with more than 40 young leaders from over 30 countries around the world, during which he stressed that human rights are the roadmap to tackle current challenges and restore common ground.

Hugh Lane Gallery Lecture

On 9 October at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, the Commissioner spoke about The artist as defender of Human Rights delivered at the Special Evening Lecture organised as part of the exhibition La Grande Illusion by artist Brian Maguire.

Meeting with the President of ABTTF - Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

On 17 April, the Commissioner met with President of the ABTTF, Halit Habip Oğlu, to discuss the rights of persons belonging to national minorities

Meeting with the Independent Commission on Reconciliation and Information Retrieval (Northern Ireland)

On 23 May, the Commissioner met with the Chief Commissioner and other representatives of the Independent Commission on Reconciliation and Information Retrieval (ICRIR). They discussed, among other things, ICRIR's work on legacy cases related to the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the most recent developments impacting on this.

Meeting with Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

On 26 June, the Commissioner met with Anne Brasseur, former president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and currently member of the Executive Board of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

Meeting with Secretary General of the Association for the Prevention of Torture

On 6 September, the Commissioner met with the outgoing Secretary General of the Association for the Prevention of Torture, Barbara Bernath, and the incoming Secretary General, Nicole Hogg, to discuss their respective priorities and cooperation.

Meeting with Amnesty International

On 2 October the Commissioner met with representatives of Amnesty International and discussed respective priorities and cooperation.

Meeting with CURE Campaign

On 2 October the Commissioner met with representatives of the CURE Campaign and discussed respective priorities and cooperation.

Meeting with the Chair of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland and meeting with the Chair of the Irish Muslim Peace & Integration Council

On 23 October, the Commissioner had a meeting in Dublin with the Chair of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, Maurice Cohen, focusing on the issue of the fight against antisemitism. The discussions centred on the need to enhance work to combat antisemitism and to promote Jewish life in Europe. On the same day, the Commissioner exchanged with the Chair of the Irish Muslim Peace & Integration Council, Umar Al-Qadri, on issues concerning the escalation of anti-Muslim hatred across Europe and the importance of strengthening respect for faith communities in our societies.

Meeting with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

On 13 November, the Commissioner met with Executive Director of the Council of Europe North-South Centre in Lisbon, Pilar Morales. They discussed human rights issues of common interest, including the empowerment of women and youth.

Meeting with International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

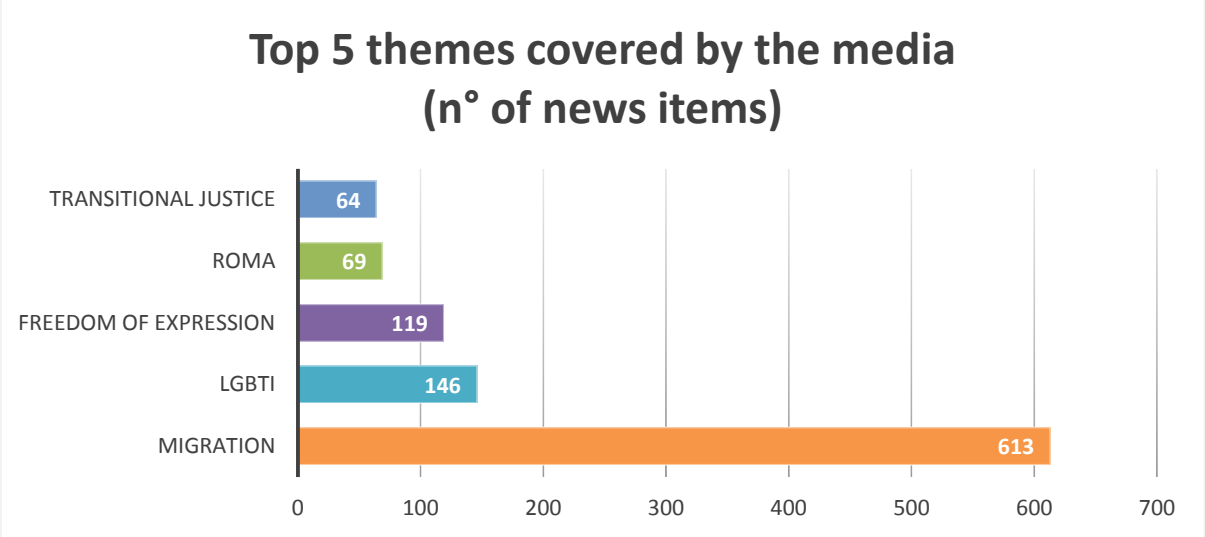
On 13 November in Lisbon, the Commissioner met with Ambassador António de Almeida-Ribeiro, Deputy Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), and members of staff. The discussions focused on current challenges to human rights and democracy.

Meeting with the Executive Director of TGEU Trans Europe and Central Asia

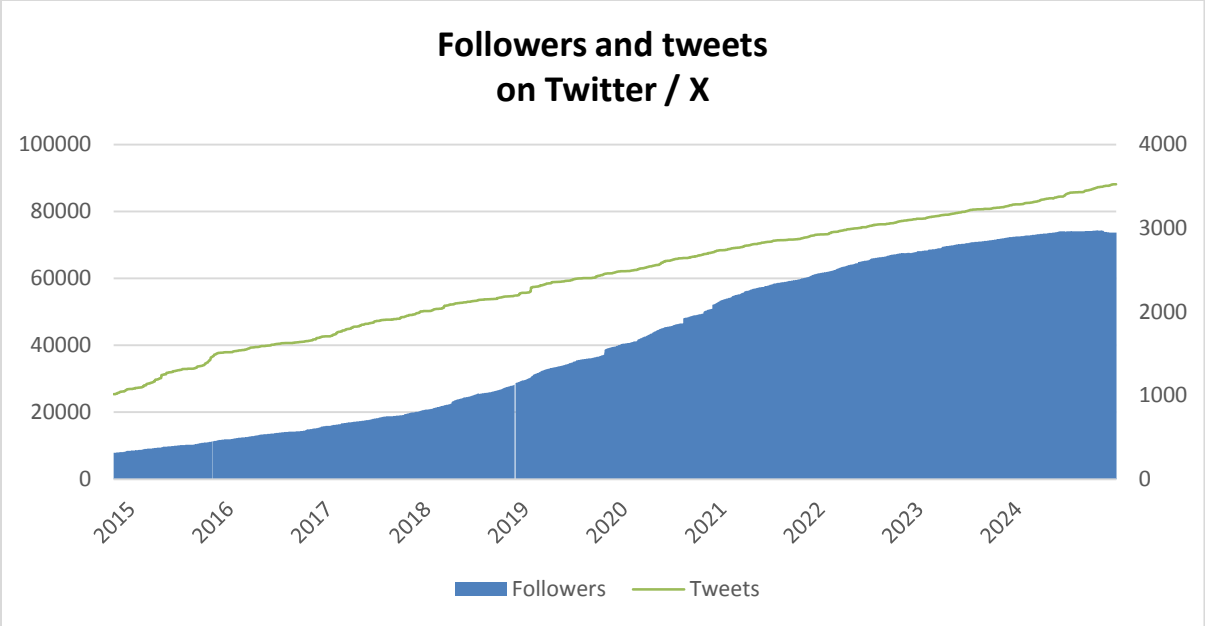
On 17 December, the Commissioner met with Ymania Brown, executive director of TGEU (Trans Europe and Central Asia) in Berlin, Germany. They discussed the state of human rights for trans people in Europe, as well as ways to strengthen protections and defend against backsliding.

8 COMMUNICATION WORK

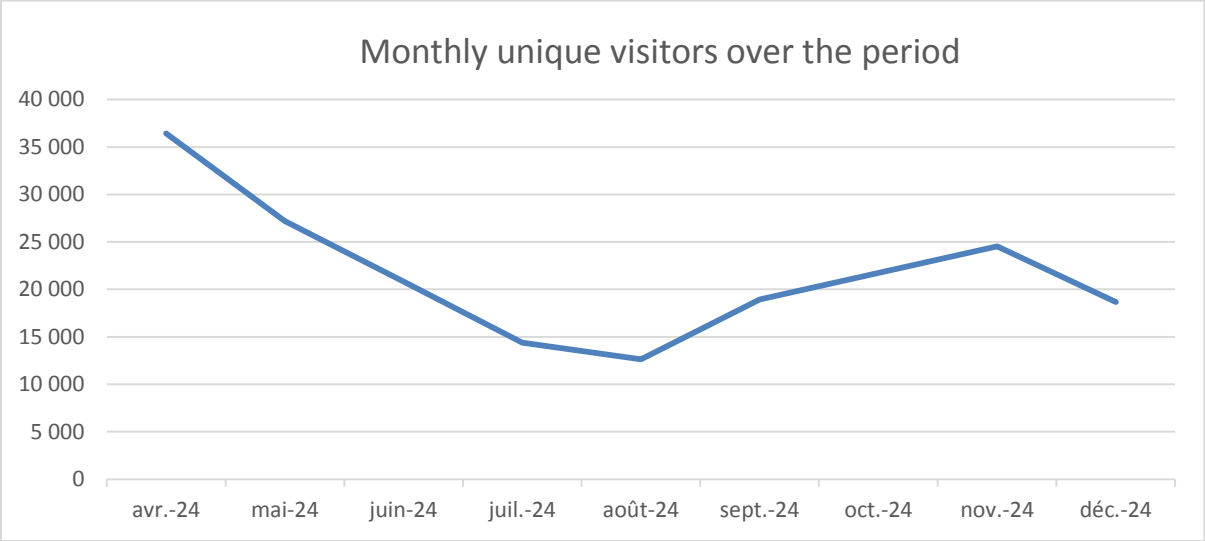
More than 900 news items covered the Commissioner's work during the reporting period (April – December 2024). The most covered topics were migration, LGBTI rights, Roma rights, and Human Rights Defenders.

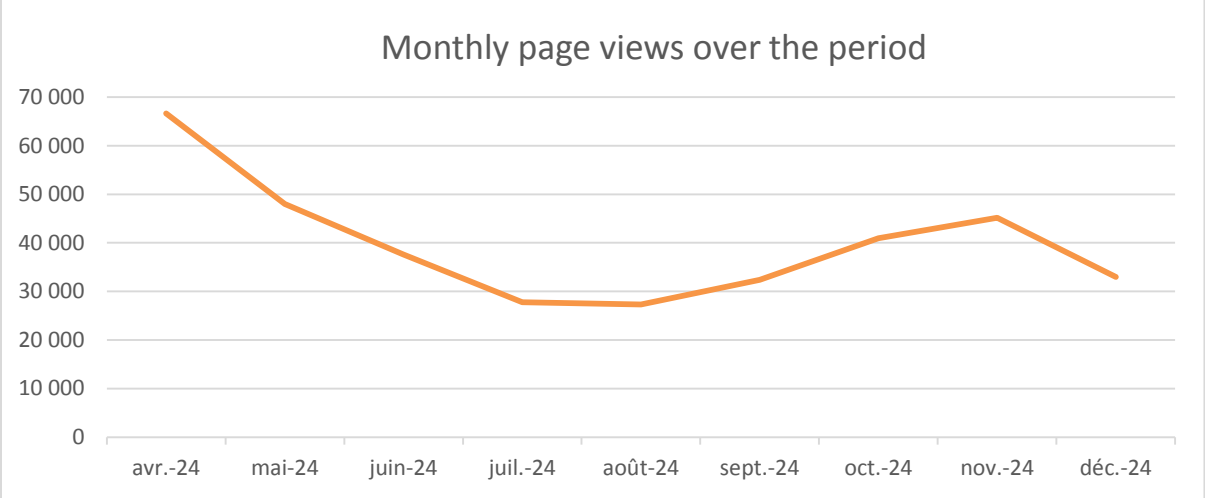


More than 200 posts were published on X, generating a total of over 700,000 impressions and an engagement rate of over 5%. The number of followers increased by over 2500.



Over the period, more than 190,000 unique visitors visited the site, with more than 350,000 page views.





9 STAFF AND BUDGET

In 2024, the total number of permanent posts in the Commissioner's office remained at 30 posts (22 A-grade posts and 8 B-grade posts). The Office employed three temporary staff members financed by the ordinary budget. The ordinary overall budget appropriations were of €4,470,100 which represents 1.5% of the total ordinary budget.

The budget of the Commissioner for Human Rights covers the basic structure necessary for the implementation of the mandatory activities which should be assured by permanent means from the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe.

APPENDIX

Summary of activities 1 January – 30 March 2024

This appendix contains a summary of the activities carried out by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, between 1 January and 31 March 2024, date of the end of her six-year mandate.

Country Focus

Visits

On 18- 20 March 2024, the Commissioner visited Montenegro, focusing on social cohesion, combating hate speech and discrimination, and upholding freedom of expression.

Reports and letters

Armenia and Azerbaijan

- Observations by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights following her visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the Karabakh region, from 16 to 23 October 2023 on the human rights situation of people affected by the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region (published on 12 January with reference CommHR(2024)1).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Borjana Krišto, the Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nermin Nikšić, and the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Radovan Višković, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

Croatia

- Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Prime Minister of Croatia, Andrej Plenković, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

Germany

- Report by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights following her visit to Germany from 27 November to 1 December 2023 with recommendations regarding the structures and legal frameworks in place to protect human rights, and access to social rights, in particular the protection from poverty and the right to adequate housing (published on 19 March with reference CommHR(2024)13).

Montenegro

- Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Milojko Spajić, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

North Macedonia

- Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Dimitar Kovačevski, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

Serbia

- Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

Slovenia

– Letter from Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Robert Golob, on dealing with past serious human rights violations (dated 4 December 2023 and published on 8 February 2024).

Türkiye

– Memorandum on freedom of expression and of the media, human rights defenders and civil society in Türkiye (published on 5 March with reference CommHR(2024)16).

Thematic Focus

Impact of the war in Ukraine on human rights

On 23 February, the Commissioner issued a statement marking the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the tenth anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

On 22 February, the Commissioner published her Recommendation "Protecting the defenders: ending repression of human rights defenders assisting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Europe". On 6 March, the Commissioner expressed her concern about the impact of asylum and migration policies on the rule of law in Europe in an op-ed entitled "Looking tough on migration is eroding human rights", published on the Politico website. On 26 March, the Commissioner reacted to media reports of practices used by the French authorities that endangered the lives of migrants crossing the Channel.

Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists

On 2 February, the Commissioner stated that the right to justice was not upheld for Serbian journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, but that the fight for justice and media freedom must continue, following the Belgrade Court of Appeal's acquittal of the suspects for his murder in 1999. On 21 February, the Commissioner commemorated the brutal murder of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová six years earlier. On 26 February, the Commissioner addressed with a video message a conference organised by the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition. On 25 March, the Commissioner published a statement, calling on Azerbaijan to release all those imprisoned for their legitimate work or for expressing dissenting or critical opinions, including journalists and civil society activists.

Women's rights and gender equality

On 10 January, the Commissioner welcomed the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Latvia, urging all member states to ratify and fully implement this landmark instrument to end violence against women and girls. On 25 January, the Commissioner attended the panel discussion on the International Day of Women in Multilateralism organised by the Representation of Liechtenstein at the Council of Europe. On 15 February, the Commissioner published her Human Rights Comment "Protecting the human rights of sex workers". On 27 February, the Commissioner published a follow-up report on sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Council of Europe area. Entitled "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe: Progress and Challenges". On 28 February, the Commissioner presented the follow-up report at an event in Crozet, France, organised by the Centre for Reproductive Rights. On 4 March, the Commissioner welcomed France's decision to include abortion in its Constitution as a historical step protecting an integral component of human rights and gender equality. On 8 March, the Commissioner published a statement to mark International Women's Day, underscoring that unimpeded access to quality sexual and reproductive health care is essential for women's rights and gender equality. On 15 March, the

Commissioner took part in the Council of Europe and Aire Centre Conference 'Implementing the Istanbul Convention through Case Law: Judicial Dialogue for an Effective Judicial Response'.

Human rights of LGBTI people

On 24 January, the Commissioner held an exchange with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's General Rapporteur on the rights of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, Christophe Lacroix. On 16 February, the Commissioner welcomed the adoption by Greece's Parliament of a bill introducing same-sex marriage. On 14 March, the Commissioner published an Issue Paper on "Human Rights and Gender Identity and Expression", along with 15 key recommendations to member states. On 27 March, the Commissioner published a statement, calling on the Georgian authorities to ensure protection of the human rights of LGBTI people and an enabling environment for the activities of civil society and human rights defenders.

Human rights of persons with disabilities

On 21 March, the Commissioner published two communications to the Committee of Ministers in the context of the supervision of the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights relating to the protection of the rights of people with intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions in Romania.

Combating racism and intolerance

On 24 January, the Commissioner published a statement stressing the need to learn about the past, condemn and reject any denial or distortion of the Holocaust and heed the warning signs of hatred, intolerance and violence. On 27 January, the Commissioner issued a statement welcoming the joint Muslim-Jewish observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potočari, Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on 21 March, the Commissioner called on all member states to fulfil their commitments to fight racism and racial discrimination.

Transitional justice

On 30 January, the Commissioner met with the President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), Judge Graciela Gatti Santana. On 30 January, the Commissioner welcomed the signature by the Registrar of the IRMCT and the Minister of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina of a Memorandum of Cooperation on the registration of the judgements of the ICTY and IRMCT into criminal records in Bosnia and Herzegovina, inviting Serbia, where such registration is still outstanding, to follow suit. On 12 February, the Commissioner met with a delegation of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR), including its Chief Commissioner, Sir Declan Morgan, on ICRIR's prospective work on Northern Ireland Troubles legacy cases. On 21 March, the Commissioner participated in a regional civil society conference entitled "Building a Common Agenda for Prevention in the Western Balkans", which focused on challenges and promising practices related to dealing with the violent past from the wars in 1990s in the region. On 19 March, having seen the play "671-Hunt" at the National Theatre of Montenegro, the Commissioner stressed that art is a powerful tool to speak about past atrocities, to honour the victims and to heal societies, and that young people are at the heart of building a better future in the region.

Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights

On 13 March, the Commissioner issued a statement calling on member states to firmly base the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (CAI) on human rights and expressing her hope that the instrument would effectively addresses the adverse impacts of AI on individuals and society and expand the predictability and dependability of the use of AI systems world-wide.

Administration of justice

On 16 February, reacting to the sudden death of Alexei Navalny, the Commissioner stressed that this was the tragic epilogue of years of reprisals against him by the Russian authorities, adding that he should not have been imprisoned in the first place.

Co-operation with national human rights structures

On 15 January, the Commissioner met with the Defender of Rights of France, Claire Hédon. On 1 March, the Commissioner sent a video message to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), on the occasion of its 25th anniversary.

Other Meetings

Meeting with the President of Montenegro

On 23 January, the Commissioner met with the President of Montenegro, Jakov Milatović. They discussed the importance of recommitting to human rights and rule of law principles and current human rights challenges, including the war in Ukraine.

Meeting of the Council of Europe Heads of Office

On 30 January, the Commissioner had an exchange with the heads of Council of Europe Offices in Strasbourg. She reiterated her appreciation for the high level of cooperation between field offices and the Office, relating to both the substance and assistance with logistics.

Estonian Annual Conference on Human Rights

On 9 February, the Commissioner took part in a panel of the annual meeting of the Estonian Institute of Human Rights.

Meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

On 27 February, in Geneva, the Commissioner had an exchange of views with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, about the state of human rights in Europe and progress and current challenges at the end of her 6-year term.

4th Fundamental Rights Forum

On 11 and 12 March, the Commissioner took part in the 4th Fundamental Rights Forum, organised by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and was one of the speakers in the Closing Panel - Reflecting on the Forum's discussions.

Discussion with President of Slovenia

On 15 March, the Commissioner's discussion with Nataša Pirc Musar, President of Slovenia, was released in the President's personal podcast 'Moč besede' on YouTube. The discussions focused on current challenges to human rights and democracy.

Exchange of views with Congress

On 26 March, the Commissioner addressed and had an exchange with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on the most critical challenges to human rights in Europe, during the Congress's 46th Session from 26 to 28 March in Strasbourg.

Human Rights Defenders

On 26 February, the Commissioner stressed that the Latvian human rights defender Ieva Raubiško should be allowed to work freely and safely and that working to save lives should not be criminalised. On 27 February, the Commissioner declared that the sentencing of Oleg Orlov of Memorial, a long-standing partner of her office, was another blow to justice and human rights in the Russian Federation. On 25 March, the Commissioner published a statement, calling on Azerbaijan to create an enabling environment for the activities of human rights defenders and others, including in relation to their enjoyment of the rights to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly (see 'Thematic activities – Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists'). On 27 March, the Commissioner published a statement, calling on the Georgian authorities to ensure an enabling environment for the activities of civil society and human rights.

System of the European Convention on Human Rights

On 25 January, the Commissioner met with Síofra O'Leary, President of the European Court of Human Rights. On 26 January, the Commissioner attended the Solemn hearing for the Opening of the Judicial Year of the European Court of Human Rights.

On 21 March, the Commissioner published two communications to the Committee of Ministers in the context of the supervision of the execution of the two groups of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, *Centre for Legal Resources on behalf of Valentin Câmpeanu v. Romania and N. (No. 2) v. Romania* and *Parascineti v. Romania, the Cristian Teodorescu group and the N. v. Romania.* These groups of judgments relate to the protection of the rights of people with intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions in Romania.