

April 2025



Newsletter



Reflections from April

Dear reader,

This past month, my work has ranged from calls for accountability in Ukraine to engagement with Roma and Traveller communities, defence of civil society space, protection of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and support for national parliaments in their human rights work.

Standing by Ukraine

Appalling attacks in Ukraine continued this month, underscoring the unrelenting brutality of Russia's aggression. On April 13, a missile strike on Sumy claimed the lives of at least 31 people, including many children, and left over 80 injured. A few days later, a drone strike on a civilian bus in Marhanets killed nine and wounded dozens more, and other deadly attacks struck Kyiv and surrounding areas. I [condemned](#) these heinous acts and reiterated that those responsible must be held to account.



© The State Emergency Service of Ukraine

Parliaments must champion human rights

Presenting my first [annual report](#) to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I [underscored](#) the pressing need for national parliaments to reclaim their role as guardians of human rights. I urged members of parliaments to check

systematically the human rights compliance of legislation and to enhance the visibility of human rights across parliamentary committees.

I am particularly concerned about legislative proposals that could have a chilling effect on civil society and negatively affects the rights of millions of people.

In [Hungary](#), I raised alarm over legislative proposals that would restrict peaceful assemblies and curtail the human rights of LGBTI people. I stressed that bans on Pride events, facial recognition surveillance of demonstrators, and constitutional amendments undermining legal gender recognition are incompatible with international human rights standards.

In the [Slovak Republic](#), I asked Parliament to refrain from adopting a draft law on non-profit organisations and encouraged lawmakers to defend the independence of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, which has come under pressure for its legitimate engagement with this legislation.



Upholding the rights of Roma and Traveller communities

On International Roma Day, I had the honour of participating in the flower-casting ceremony in Strasbourg. [Speaking](#) alongside Roma and Traveller youth, I reaffirmed my unwavering support for the leadership and resilience of youth and women, who are driving change.

My recent visits to Roma communities across Europe have deepened my understanding of their rich diversity and the persistent human rights violations they endure. This month I visited [North Macedonia](#) where I noted both promising steps forward in upholding the human rights of Roma and areas for improvement, in particular as concerns systemic discrimination across many areas of life and the impact on Roma of environmental degradation, notably for those living in dire conditions.

In Autumn this year, I will publish a report on the human rights situation of Roma and Travellers across Europe, focusing on the experiences of women and girls.



Human rights defenders, protests and journalists

One year after the arrest of Anar Mammadli in Azerbaijan, I [called](#) for his immediate release, as well as that of dozens of others detained for defending human rights or expressing dissent. I also urged the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure that all laws and practices in connection with the freedoms of association, assembly and expression and the situation of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists in the country comply with relevant Council of Europe human rights standards.

During a mission to Serbia, I [focused](#) on the policing of student-led demonstrations, calling on the authorities to ensure the safety of demonstrators and improve working environment for civil society and human rights defenders.

Ahead of World Press Freedom Day, I [highlighted](#) that protecting press freedom is not an option, it is a legal obligation. I also reaffirmed my commitment to monitor press freedom in member states and to collaborate with the relevant actors to ensure the application of international standards.

Lastly, in an exchange with the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers I [reflected](#) on the progress made during the first year of mandate across my four strategic priorities: defending human rights in Ukraine; embedding human rights in responses to contemporary global challenges; promoting the rights of marginalised communities, especially Roma and Travellers; and safeguarding civil society and human rights defenders.

Safeguarding human rights is not a luxury. Despite the challenges, I remain hopeful because I see the resilience of civil society, the many committed public officials and parliamentarians, the courage of human rights defenders and journalists, and the mobilisation of young leaders. I will continue to use the toolbox of my mandate to protect and strengthen human rights for everyone.

Thank you for reading,

Michael O'Flaherty

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Feel free to share this newsletter with others. If you haven't subscribed yet, sign up [here](#).

Follow my work on:

