



Newsletter



Reflections from August

Dear reader,

This month, my work centred on defending human rights and freedoms in the face of war and on the suppression of dissent.

I [condemned](#) Russia's continued horrific missile and drone strikes against Ukraine. In recent months, such strikes have caused thousands of civilian deaths and injuries. These attacks are yet another reminder of the senseless brutality of the war. They must stop, victims must receive redress and those responsible must be held accountable. Ahead of the US-led talks concerning Ukraine, I issued a [statement](#) and wrote an [op-ed](#) emphasising the importance of anchoring peace negotiations in human rights. Any agreement that does not take human rights into account will be fragile from the outset and will not deliver a lasting peace.



As the conflict in Gaza continues, I once again [called](#) on Council of Europe member states to refrain from arms transfers that could lead to human rights violations. Member states must do their utmost to prevent and address violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of the conflict in Gaza. This includes applying existing legal standards to ensure that arms transfers are not authorised where there is a risk that they may be used to commit human rights violations.

I expressed serious concerns about the repression and criminalisation of journalists, human rights defenders and youth activists in several member states. Regarding Türkiye, I [asked](#) the Turkish authorities to immediately release Enes Hocaogulları, a youth delegate to the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in respect of Türkiye after he was arrested and detained following his intervention at a

plenary sitting of the Congress, and to safeguard freedom of expression and the work of human rights defenders.

As regards Georgia, I [expressed](#) my concern over the two-year prison sentence handed down to Georgian journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli. This sentence is disproportionate and raises serious issues under the European Convention on Human Rights. I urged the authorities to release her and to ensure that journalists can work freely and without unnecessary interference and with full respect for the right to freedom of expression.

Following new cases of disproportionate use of police force to manage demonstrations in Serbia, I [called](#) on the authorities to avoid excessive force, end arbitrary arrests, and work to de-escalate tensions.

In Latvia, human rights defender Ieva Raubiško was sentenced to 200 hours of community service for providing urgent humanitarian aid to asylum seekers. This prompted me to [reiterate](#) my concern about the criminalisation of life-saving work, a growing phenomenon across Europe.



During the commemoration of the over 500,000 Roma and Sinti people murdered during the Second World War, I [emphasised](#) the importance of investing in initiatives that preserve their history and empower Roma communities to tell their own stories.



On the occasion of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, I [co-signed](#) a joint statement with UN and regional human rights bodies, drawing attention to the profound and lasting suffering inflicted by enforced disappearances on victims, their relatives, and society as a whole. Enforced disappearance is among the gravest human rights violations. We called on states to act to end this abhorrent crime and I also urged all Council of Europe member states that have not yet done so

to ratify the UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.



During the panel “Democracy in the digital age: unmasking the power of deception” at the European Forum Alpbach I [stressed](#) that as technologies like AI impact on human rights and dignity, we need regulation that engages the private sector in developing practices compliant with human rights law.

In the face of war and repression, human rights are our only true compass. Let us follow them with unwavering resolve.

Thank you for reading,

Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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