



News roundup



Reflections from February

This month I have engaged on a variety of issues, from the situation in Ukraine to the suspension of USAID, from the protection of human rights of migrants to the situation of Roma and Travellers, and other issues.

As I stressed in an opinion piece, the [US aid freeze is a critical test for Europe](#). The suspension of U.S. international aid is already having severe consequences, undermining humanitarian programs, civil society, independent media and the democratic fabric of our society. Member states must step up, coordinate efforts, and fill the gap before more damage is done.

Concerning the human rights of **migrants and asylum seekers**, during my [visit to Greece](#), I called for accountability in the wake of the Pylos shipwreck and reports of pushbacks. I stressed the need to strengthen independent human rights monitoring of border control operations and to reinforce European solidarity.



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Always in relation to migration issues, **I intervened in three hearings** before the European Court of Human Rights in cases against [Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland](#), encouraging the Court to reaffirm that non-refoulement obligations must be upheld without exception.



*Commissioner O'Flaherty during the hearings
before the European Court of Human Rights*

I also went to Brussels to **strengthen the dialogue with EU and civil society representatives**. I held exchanges with the [LIBE](#) and DROI Committees of the European Parliament, where I emphasised the importance of cooperation and vigilance in safeguarding human rights. I also met with EU Commissioner Hadja Lahbib to discuss cooperation in advancing equality and human rights, including for Roma and Travellers, and with civil society representatives to reinforce the synergies for collective action.

While in Brussels, I also refuted misleading claims by the U.S. Vice-President that Europe is abandoning its principles. Our system is not perfect, but our commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law remains firm, as I made clear in interviews with [POLITICO](#), [The Irish Times](#) and [The Guardian](#).

As concerns the treatment of the **Roma and Travellers** communities, I published three memoranda to [Finland, Ireland, and Slovakia](#), I acknowledged progress, praised commitments and urged stronger resolve to combat antigypsyism, tackle inequalities and ensure the representation and participation of Roma and Traveller communities in decision-making.

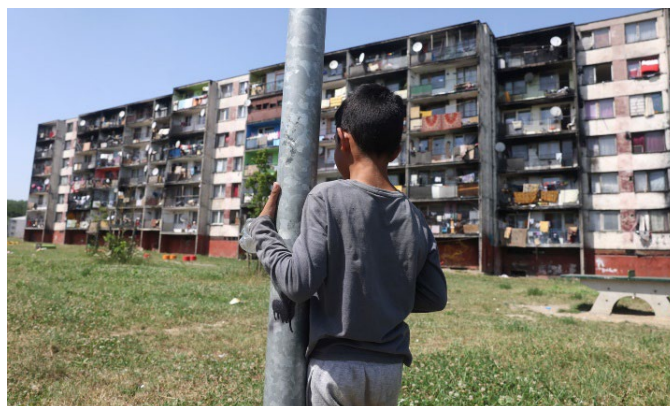


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I also continued to closely monitor developments related to **freedom of expression and association in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, urging the authorities

of **Republika Srpska** to repeal the "[foreign agent](#)" law, which imposes regulations lacking safeguards and posing a risk of arbitrary enforcement against civil society organisations that receive foreign funding.

Finally, I took part in two topical human rights **conferences**. In the Annual Lecture organised by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission I focused on the need to [uphold the rule of law](#), warning against **complacency**, calling for decisive **leadership** and greater investment in **oversight** institutions. At the Dublin conference on "The Role of the Council of Europe in the Pursuit of Peace, Justice and Accountability in Ukraine" I set out [ten points](#) for a **human rights roadmap** towards a just, fair, lasting, and effective **peace**, stressing that **Ukraine** owes us nothing. It is we who owe Ukraine an undying debt of gratitude for being the ones willing to stand up to Russia.



*Commissioner O'Flaherty speaking at the Conference
"The Role of the Council of Europe in the Pursuit of Peace,
Justice and Accountability in Ukraine"*

Human rights are not self-sustaining. They require active defence and promotion. From migration policies to inclusive measures, from protecting civil society to countering disinformation, we must remain relentless in upholding **human rights for all**.

Thank you for reading,

Michael O'Flaherty

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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