



News roundup



Reflections from March

Dear reader,

my work in March ranged from human rights in Ukraine to protests in Türkiye, from concerning legislative initiatives in Hungary and Poland to the need to increase human rights protection in Georgia, and the important role of local and regional governments and national human rights institutions in Europe.

Human rights in the peace process in Ukraine

During my [visit to Ukraine](#), I stressed that any peace process must be grounded in human rights, justice, accountability, and an unwavering commitment to human dignity. As I also stressed in a [Shout out](#) that I published prior to the visit, a just, lasting peace demands accountability for war crimes, redress for victims, return of detainees and deported children, and the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. I called for continued support for Ukraine's national capacity to prosecute and try war criminals, for its reconstruction efforts, as well as for international justice mechanisms. I also stressed the importance of ensuring women's full participation in the peace process and the involvement of Ukraine and its civil society in such talks.



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Need for stronger human rights protection in Georgia

In a [Memorandum](#) based on my visit to Georgia, I highlighted concerns over freedom of assembly and expression, police accountability, shrinking civil society space, LGBTI rights, and press freedom. I recommended ensuring independent investigations into cases of ill-treatment of protesters, increasing the protection of journalists and establishing an enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders. I also called on the authorities to cease all stigmatisation of LGBTI people, ensure that all cases of harassment and violence are effectively investigated and repeal the law on protection of family values and minors, which provides a legal footing for discrimination against LGBTI people.

Policing demonstrations in Türkiye

I followed with deep concern the disproportionate use of force by police and restrictions on freedom of expression during the recent protests in Türkiye, following the arrest of Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. I [called](#) on the authorities to uphold the rights to freedom of assembly and expression and stressed their obligation to ensure that force in policing demonstrations must be a last resort and meet strict standards of necessity and proportionality. I also urged them to release those detained while legitimately exercising their human rights and to ensure that journalists can report on public assemblies freely and safely.



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Legislative initiatives undermining human rights in Hungary and Poland

In a [letter](#) addressed to the Polish Senate, I urged it to reject proposed amendments to asylum legislation that introduce restrictions on access to asylum at the border with Belarus and could result in individuals being returned without a proper assessment of their claims, thus violating the European Convention on Human Rights.

Furthermore, I [called](#) on the President of Hungary to veto a law that restricts freedom of assembly and provides the basis for banning events like Pride marches.

Local governments and NHRIs are key human rights actors

In my first [address](#) to the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, I stressed that local and regional governments play a vital role in protecting human rights and I pledged to intensify cooperation and help them embed international standards into their work.



In another meeting in Strasbourg, I [stressed](#) the vital, courageous work of ombuds and national human rights institutions amid rising threats to democracy and the rule of law. I emphasised the importance of solidarity and collaboration with the Council of Europe, and made three commitments: to collaborate closely, help establish NHRIs in all member states and use my mandate to protect and support these bodies.



The events of this month have once again shown that human rights are not abstract ideals. They make the concrete difference between safety and danger, between freedom and fear, between justice and impunity. Our response must be as local as it is international, as principled as it is pragmatic.

Thank you for reading,

Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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