

CommHR(2025)27

Presentation of first year of activities to the Committee of Ministers

Speech by Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Strasbourg, 30 April 2025

The Commissioner held today an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers. Below is the published version of his introductory remarks.

"Dear President, dear ambassadors,

Let me begin by offering my deepest condolences to the Holy See on the death of His Holiness Pope Francis. With the passing of Pope Francis, we have lost one of the most important human rights champion on the planet, and we are all the poorer for that.

I would like to give you a brief overview of my activities during the past year. This has been the subject of my first [annual report](#) for 2024, which I hope you have had a chance to review.

That report contains three elements.

First, some opening general observations by me. Second, a very detailed account of my activities. And third, and specific for 2024, an annex addressing the activities of Dunja Mijatović in the first three months of the year.

I would now like to focus on some highlights, taking account of my four priority areas.

As you know, my first priority is standing up for the human rights of the people of Ukraine. I have visited there three times since the conflict began, twice as commissioner, most recently last month when I spent time in Lviv and Kiev.

Of course, multiple human rights issues arise, but my preoccupation right now is ensuring that human rights is embedded in the path to peace. I have already published [10 elements](#) for such an approach, and it will be the subject of an upcoming memorandum, which I will offer to the government of Ukraine. I will just name the 10 items:

- Ensuring accountability for human rights abuse.
- Delivering redress and reparations.
- Not forgetting prisoners, children, and missing persons.
- Ensuring a respectful treatment of IDPs and refugees.
- Not forgetting the human rights of the people in occupied territories.
- Transitioning from martial law.

- Embedding human rights in reconstruction.
- Recognising the interplay of human rights in the peace path and the accession pathway to the EU.
- Never overlooking the role of women in the making of peace.
- The involvement in peace work of all key actors, including multilateral organisations and civil society.

I believe it is all of our role to keep insisting that all 10 of these dimensions are not overlooked as we look forward towards peace and seizing every possible opportunity, including the July Reconstruction Conference, which will take place in Rome.

My second of the four priorities is embedding human rights in the great issues of our day. I am doing that across a number of areas. Let me focus exclusively on migration, where multiple human rights issues arise.

The dominant one in the past year has been related to the securitisation of borders and the extent to which human rights have been sacrificed in that process, including the right to apply for asylum and the right to be protected from refoulement.

In this context, through missions or other forms, I have engaged with the authorities of seven member states: [Cyprus](#), [Finland](#), [Greece](#), [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#), [Poland](#), and the [United Kingdom](#).

I have also made [interventions](#) at the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the form of third party contributions around three migration cases.

The third of my priorities has to do with standing up for the human rights of otherwise forgotten, overlooked, and marginalised people. The focus since I took up the position has been on the 12 million strong community of [Roma and Travellers](#).

In this context, I have done five country visits to [Greece](#), [Finland](#), [Ireland](#), [North Macedonia](#), [Slovakia](#). I have also conducted meetings with organisations in Berlin and Heidelberg. After these visits, except for that to North Macedonia which took place only last week, I have submitted to the member states a detailed memorandum outlining achievements, good practiseto be exchanged with other member states, and of course, challenges and how they might be addressed.

I will later this year issue a report focussing specifically on standing up for the human rights of Roma women and girls. I very much look forward to coming back to you later in the year to discuss the work on Roma and Travellers.

The fourth and final of my priorities has to do with standing up for human rights defenders and more generally, the protection of civil society.

There are multiple challenges in this context across Council of Europe member states. Foreign funding laws, problematic lobbying laws and worrying laws regarding the making of grants. There is a targeting in some places of groups working on LGBTI issues. There has also been the very heavy negative impact for civil society of the disappearance of [USAID](#) support.

I have engaged with 10 countries around issues of human rights defenders and civil society. [Azerbaijan](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) in the specific context of Republika Srpska, [Georgia](#), [Greece](#), [Hungary](#), [Italy](#), [Poland](#), [Slovakia](#), [Türkiye](#), and most recently in the context of the student protests, [Serbia](#).

In conclusion, I want to assure you of important horizontal considerations and how I engage them. I am endeavouring to ensure that the voice of young people is informing me and informing how I conduct and implement my mandate. I take very seriously the gendering of the work and all of my staff have benefited from gender sensitivity training in recent weeks.

We will continue to invest in ensuring that our commitment on gender is not just rhetorical, but real. And thirdly, I take very seriously issues of cooperation and complementarity internally within the Council of Europe and much more broadly, including with such partners as the UN. I also consider as a form of cooperation the extent to which I have made third party interventions at the Court and will make Rule 9 interventions in this committee.

Let me conclude these remarks about the horizontal considerations by assuring you that my work is and will continue to be deeply informed by judgments of the Court of Human Rights.

Thank you."