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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

(CDDH)

Measures and practices in place in Council of Europe member States: Supplementary Information from Amnesty International to Marie Struthers' Presentation at the Helsinki Conference on the Protection and the Promotion of Civil Society Space in Europe

This document provides a compilation by Amnesty International of mostly negative trends and incidents impacting on civil society space and the enabling environment for human rights defenders identified by Amnesty International in its 2024 [Annual Report](#) pertaining to the period of 2023, and subsequent reporting. This document was prepared to inform the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) in its ongoing work on the examination of the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe. This document is not exhaustive and does not exclude other developments affecting civil society space or human rights defenders.

ALBANIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In March [2023], a gun attack on the headquarters of the national television broadcaster Top Channel resulted in the death of a security guard. In January [2023], a journalist and his wife were physically attacked in Lezhë by two businessmen following the publication of an article he had written about a court case. Journalists were also attacked by political figures. Erion Veliaj, the mayor of Tirana, referred to an investigative journalist known as “O.X.” as a “contract killer” in response to an article she had written highlighting the role the mayor had played in the incinerator project for public waste management in Tirana.”¹

ANDORRA

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“In December [2023], Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, the president of the women’s rights organization Associació Stop Violències, stood trial accused of a “crime against the prestige of the institutions”. The prosecutor’s office brought criminal charges against her in 2020 following her engagement with the CEDAW Committee when she spoke out about the harmful impact of a total ban on abortion in Andorra, and in July requested that the court fine her EUR 6,000, an additional EUR 6,000 to compensate the Andorran government and a six-month ban from exercising any public function.”² She was finally acquitted on 17 January 2024, but should never have been charged in the first place.³ “In October [2023], the UN Secretary General’s annual report included Andorra in a list of 40 countries across the world where individuals and organizations faced reprisals for cooperating with the UN.”⁴

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“Defamation laws including the criminalization of legitimate criticism of the authorities remained in force, breaching international human rights law.”⁵

ARMENIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“The media environment remained largely free and pluralistic, but was deeply polarized over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and conflict with Azerbaijan. International observers also reported an unprecedented level of disinformation and hate speech. In March [2023], the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) welcomed the decriminalization in July 2022 of the provision which punished insulting government officials and public figures. Concerns

¹ Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 74.

² *ibid*, p. 77.

³ Amnesty International, [“Andorra: Acquittal of activist who raised concerns about total abortion ban at a UN meeting ‘an important victory’”](#), 17 January 2024; Amnesty International, [“Andorra: Further information: Activist defending abortion rights acquitted: Vanessa Mendoza Cortés”](#), 12 February 2024.

⁴ Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 77.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 78.

remained regarding the safety of journalists who continued to be regularly subjected to pressure, insults and violence by government supporters. At least two journalists reported being subjected to an intense campaign of online harassment and threats, including by some public officials, after their critical questioning of the prime minister about events in Nagorno-Karabakh at a press conference on 25 July. The investigation into this alleged interference with journalistic activities was ongoing at year's end.

The government's attempts to restrict free expression online were deterred after draft amendments proposed in December 2022 were put on hold following international criticism. The amendments would have given the government the power to censor online content, block websites and curb internet access under martial law."⁶

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

"On 12 June [2024], clashes erupted in Yerevan's city centre between police and those protesting the border demarcation deal with neighbouring Azerbaijan as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was scheduled to address Parliament. The authorities responded to attempts to block access to the Parliament building by using stun grenades. The stand-off with the protesters descended into a chaotic confrontation. According to the Ministry of Health, at least 101 individuals sought medical assistance following the clashes. Of these, 66 have since been discharged, while 32 remain hospitalized with injuries ranging from minor to moderate. The violence also resulted in injuries to 17 police officers. At least 98 people were detained during the protests. The Armenian Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case into "engaging in violent acts against law enforcement." Suspects in this case have not yet been named."⁷

"On 19 September [2023], thousands gathered in the capital, Yerevan, to demand the resignation of the prime minister and protest against Azerbaijan's military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. Some protesters broke windows in government buildings and clashed with police. The Helsinki Committee of Armenia, an NGO monitoring the protests, reported that police at times used "disproportionate and indiscriminate force" including beatings and firing stun grenades directly into the crowd without warning. More than 140 protesters were reportedly detained and more than 30 were injured. Most protesters were released without charge, while some faced administrative and criminal proceedings. By year's end there had been no effective investigation into the reports of unlawful use of force by the police."⁸

AUSTRIA

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

"At several protests in Vienna, police prevented journalists from observing and reporting protests. Decision-makers publicly suggested criminalizing climate activists for their forms of protest and civil disobedience, in particular for blocking streets. On 11 October [2023], police banned a pro-Palestinian protest in Vienna, citing national security concerns. Despite the ban, the protest took place."⁹

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

"In October [2023], a freedom of information law was proposed that fell short of international standards because it exempted most municipalities from an active obligation to publish information of general interest. There was a worrying increase in the number of attacks on press

⁶ *ibid*, p. 83.

⁷ Amnesty International, "[Armenia: Violence during street protests must be investigated](#)", 13 June 2024.

⁸ Amnesty International, "[The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#)", p. 82-83.

⁹ Amnesty International, "[The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#)", p. 86.

freedom and strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) suits [against journalists and human rights activists](#).¹⁰

UNLAWFUL USE OF FORCE

“Police accountability for unlawful use of force remained inadequate. In March [2023], the police used pepper spray and batons unnecessarily and disproportionately against climate activists at a protest in Vienna. Parliament approved a police oversight body to be established in 2024, although there were concerns over its independence. Police were still not required to wear identification badges, which continued to impede accountability.”¹¹

AZERBAIJAN

OVERVIEW

“The Azerbaijani authorities have faced international criticism for their alleged torture and other ill-treatment of some government critics. In some cases, individuals suffering from worsening health in prison are denied access to adequate health care. In addition, relatives and family members of government critics have also been targeted, either by smear campaigns or by the freezing of their assets through financial sanctions. Azerbaijan has also adopted restrictive laws excessively regulating the work of media and NGOs in recent years, while peaceful protests have been severely restricted for over a decade.”¹²

As Azerbaijan prepares to host the COP29 in November 2024, “Amnesty International [has raised] concerns on Azerbaijan’s human rights record and corresponding implications for Azerbaijan as a host country which aims to ensure effective discussions at COP29 and meaningful outcomes. These concerns include violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, reprisals against human rights defenders and journalists, an effective ban on independent human rights monitoring in the country, widespread violations of the right to a fair trial, and abuse of the criminal justice system for political purposes.”¹³

“Some key examples of arbitrary arrests of activists and human rights defenders include the recent case of Anar Mammadli, a prominent human rights defender and climate advocate, who was arrested on 29 April 2024 and placed in pre-trial detention, facing charges of conspiracy to unlawfully bring money into the country. If convicted, he faces up to eight years in prison. The charges against him are fabricated and his prosecution is apparent retaliation for his criticism of the government and his activism. Anar Mammadli is a founder of the Climate of Justice Initiative, a civil society group which uses the forum of COP29 to highlight human right violations and advocate for the protection of civic space and for environmental justice in Azerbaijan.”¹⁴

“Anti-corruption activist and academic Gubad Ibadoghlu, human rights defender Ilhamiz Guliyev, and opposition leader Tofiq Yagublu also remain in custody on fabricated charges. Their arrests and prosecutions are apparent retaliations for their political and civic activities and illustrate the government’s escalating crackdown on peaceful dissent and criticism ahead of COP29.”¹⁵

“On 6 March 2024, police raided one of the last remaining independent news channels, Toplum TV, its partner organization, the Institute of Democratic Initiatives (IDI), and the Platform for the

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Amnesty International, “[COP29: States must press Azerbaijani authorities to end assault on civil society](#)”, 8 October 2024.

¹³ Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: The Human Rights Situation in Azerbaijan ahead of COP29](#)”, 11 July 2024, p. 2.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2; Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Human rights defender detained: Anar Mammadli](#)”, 16 May 2024.

¹⁵ Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: The Human Rights Situation in Azerbaijan ahead of COP29](#)”, 11 July 2024, p. 2; Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Further information: Drop charges and release Gubad Ibadoghlu](#)”, 15 May 2024; Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Further information: Free prominent opposition leader: Tofiq Yagublu](#)”, 31 May 2024.

Third Republic, an opposition group. Authorities then detained about a dozen journalists and activists including Toplum TV founder Alasgar Mammadli, journalist Mushfig Jabbar, Third Republic board members Akif Gubanov and Ruslan Izzatli and IDI activists Ramil Babayev and Ali Zeynalov.”¹⁶ In July and August 2024, “[a]cademics Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov were arrested on fabricated charges including “high treason” in retaliation of their academic writings and activism. Both remain in custody and are not allowed visitors or communication with their families. If found guilty they face lengthy prison terms of up to 20 years.”¹⁷

“In the two weeks leading up to Azerbaijan’s 1 September [2024] snap parliamentary elections, held under what OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observers [called](#) a “restrictive political and legal environment,” several government critics were detained. On 21 August, researcher and activist Bahruz Samadov was arrested and charged with “high treason” for his critical articles on Azerbaijan’s Nagorno-Karabakh policy and connections with Armenian activists. This mirrors the July arrest of Talysh minority advocate Igbal Abilov, also charged with “high treason.” Both remain in custody.”¹⁸

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

“Restrictive NGO legislation continued to impose barriers such as arbitrary denial of registration and restrictions over securing funding for human rights groups.

The media remained severely restricted. Government critics, journalists, media representatives and human rights defenders faced increased instances of violence, harassment and arbitrary arrests. Azerbaijani human rights organizations reported that the number of individuals jailed under politically motivated charges had doubled compared with the previous year, to more than 230 people.

A new restrictive media law adopted in 2022 required media outlets to register with the authorities. From November, the Media Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan was reported to have begun legal action to close independent media entities that had been denied registration on arbitrary grounds.

Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, an opposition activist, remained imprisoned since his detention in December 2022 on politically motivated charges. In March [2023], he ended a hunger strike shortly after intimate photographs, videos and conversations with women were leaked from his social media accounts.

[Gubad Ibadoghlu](#), a renowned academic and anti-corruption activist, was arbitrarily arrested by plain-clothes police officers on 23 July [2023] in the capital, Baku, on fabricated charges of “religious extremism” and “acquiring or selling counterfeit money”. He was detained together with his wife (who was later released) shortly after helping set up a foundation aimed at benefiting students by seeking funding from assets confiscated under anti-corruption legislation. Gubad Ibadoghlu’s health deteriorated due to prison conditions and lack of adequate healthcare.

More than a dozen activists were reportedly detained under administrative proceedings in September and October [2023] for criticizing the government and its military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh. Five men were arrested for posting anti-war content on social media. Three others – Nurlan Gahramanli, Emin Ibrahimov and Nemet Abbasov – were given 30 days’ administrative detention for purportedly disseminating harmful information and disobeying the

¹⁶ Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: The Human Rights Situation in Azerbaijan ahead of COP29](#)”, 11 July 2024, p. 3; Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Campaign of intimidation against independent media continues with raid on Toplum TV](#)”, 7 March 2024.

¹⁷ Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov](#)”, 23 September 2024.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, “[Azerbaijan: Release Bahruz Samadov and other government critics targeted during election campaign](#)”, 2 September, 2024.

police. Afiaddin Mammadov, a trade union leader, was arrested on fabricated charges of physical assault carrying up to five years in prison and remained in pretrial detention at year's end.

In November and December [2023], ahead of snap presidential elections expected in February 2024, police arrested at least 13 people on charges that appeared to be fabricated in retaliation for their criticism of the authorities. Prominent opposition politician Tofiq Yagublu was arrested for allegedly falsifying documents. Abzas Media director Ulvi Hasanli, his colleagues Sevinj Vagifgizi, Nargiz Absalamova and Mahammad Kekalov, and investigative journalist Hafiz Babali were jailed on charges of smuggling after Abzas Media reported allegations of government corruption. Independent journalists Teymur Karimov, Ibrahim Humbatov, Arshad Ibrahimov, Aziz Orujov and Rufat Muradli, as well as activists Mohyaddin Orujov and Ilhamiz Guliyev, were arrested on charges ranging from illegal construction to possession of drugs and extortion.”¹⁹

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

“The authorities continued to arbitrarily restrict the right to peaceful assembly. On 20 June [2023] police violently broke up a peaceful environmental protest in the village of Söyüdlü, Gadabay district, by local activists demonstrating against the planned expansion of a gold mine. Footage showed police beating protesters with truncheons and spraying a chemical irritant directly into the faces of several women protesters.

Approximately 10 people were injured and a dozen were temporarily detained during the protest and its aftermath. This included at least three journalists briefly detained and beaten by the police while covering the protests and several activists arrested following the protests for their critical social media posts. Police also reportedly blocked access to Söyüdlü from 22 June [2023] for at least three weeks, allowing only residents and progovernment media outlets to enter.”²⁰

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

“Women continued to face various forms of gender-based violence, including being targeted as instruments of political revenge.

Local women activists raised concerns about the safety and security of several women whose intimate photographs, videos and messages were leaked from the private accounts of arrested opposition activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev (see above, Freedom of expression and association). The activists accused the government of being behind the leaks and making those women targets of violence, including from their own families, by releasing their names, images and, in one case, their home address. The investigation into the alleged cybercrime was ongoing at the end of the year.”²¹

BELGIUM

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

“In December [2023], following opposition by trade unions and human rights groups, among others, the government withdrew a proposal that would have allowed judges to impose a temporary general prohibition on participation in public assemblies as a complementary penalty on people convicted of protest-related criminal offences.

In April [2023], 22 Greenpeace activists protested peacefully against fossil fuel investments at the port of Zeebrugge; 14 were arrested and detained for 48 hours. In November [2023], the Bruges

¹⁹ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 88.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 89.

court of first instance found them guilty of unlawful intrusion into the critical infrastructure of the port facility. No sentences were handed down.”²²

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

“The BiH Journalists’ Association recorded an increase in attacks on journalists, with over 70 cases recorded in 2023, of which fewer than 25% were investigated.

In July [2023], the [Republika Srpska] National Assembly passed amendments to the Criminal Code to classify defamation as a criminal offence, punishable by a fine of up to BAM 3,000 (EUR 1,500). The UN, Council of Europe and EU condemned the move, saying it breached BiH’s international human rights commitments. The Media Freedom Rapid Response project said the law posed an “existential threat” to independent journalism. In September [2023], Journalist Club Banja Luka filed a petition to formally challenge the law before the RS Constitutional Court.

In September [2023], the RS National Assembly adopted in its first reading the Law on Special Registry and Publicity of the Work of NGOs, establishing a registry of foreign-funded NGOs, classified as “agents of foreign influence”, and requiring extensive reporting requirements and heavy penalties for noncompliance. The Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner warned that the law would further restrict the rights of NGOs and human rights defenders, and the EU called for its withdrawal.”²³

LGBTI PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

“In March [2023], [Republika Srpska] police banned a film screening organized by LGBTI groups in Banja Luka, citing threats from violent groups. The organizers, who sought shelter in another venue, were then attacked by a group of men. Activists said that police officers who were nearby failed to protect them. The Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner said the authorities had an obligation to protect LGBTI people’s right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

In a separate incident, participants in the 8 March [2023] women’s rights protest were physically and verbally attacked because one participant was carrying a rainbow flag. The Council of Europe’s human rights commissioner condemned the violence and urged police to investigate.

In the month leading up to the annual Pride march in Sarajevo in June [2023], LGBTI activists faced widespread discriminatory speech on social media platforms, including from public officials.”²⁴

BULGARIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“Independent journalists and media outlets reporting on organized crime and corruption continued to face threats, harassment and smear campaigns. Public officials and businesses filed numerous strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) against journalists and reporters.

In March [2023], an insurance company filed a defamation lawsuit against independent news website Mediapool claiming a record BGN 1 million (EUR 500,000) in damages, putting the website at risk of bankruptcy.

In April [2023], the Sofia City Prosecutor’s Office published screenshots of a journalist’s private communication with a source. The Media Freedom Rapid Response project called this an “alarming violation of source confidentiality”. In the same month, journalists Dimitar Stoyanov,

²² *ibid.*, p. 97.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁴ *ibid.*

Atanas Tchobanov and Nikolay Marchenko were targeted by six defamation lawsuits over their reporting on links between a suspected drug lord and Bulgarian police officials. Media associations publicly condemned “retaliatory and vexatious legal actions” against journalists.

In July [2023], parliament adopted changes to the Criminal Code that provided greater, albeit insufficient, protection for journalists against SLAPPs, including a significant reduction in fines for defamation against public officials. The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom identified Bulgaria as a “high risk” country in terms of media freedom and pluralism.”²⁵

CROATIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“Journalists investigating organized crime and corruption continued to face harassment, including strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). According to a survey by the Croatian Journalists’ Association, there were at least 945 SLAPPs against editors and journalists, mostly filed by public officials. Defamation remained a criminal offence. In December, the government adopted the National Plan on Culture and Media Development 2023-2027, which included concrete measures to facilitate early detection and dismissal of SLAPPs.

In July [2023], the Ministry of Culture and Media proposed a draft media law, which, among other things, would allow publishers and editors to refuse to publish a journalist’s reports without explanation, and would require journalists to reveal their sources. The Croatian Journalists’ Association argued that the law would seriously undermine journalistic freedom and encourage media censorship. The International Federation of Journalists urged the government to “rethink” the proposal.”²⁶

CZECHIA

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

“An attempt by the mayor of Prague to restrict protest marches on a major road in the city was overruled by the municipal court, which said that this violated the right to freedom of assembly without adequate justification.”²⁷

DENMARK

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In September [2023], the government responded to a series of Qur’an burnings with a legislative proposal criminalizing “improper treatment of religious scriptures of significant importance to a recognized religious community”. The [law was adopted](#) by the parliament in December, although it was criticized for containing vague language which could have negative implications for freedom of expression, as well as freedom of assembly and association. The law also took insufficient action to tackle anti-Muslim hatred, one of the underlying reasons for these Qur’an burnings.”²⁸

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 109.

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 141. See also Council of Europe, [“Press Freedom in Europe: Time to Turn the Tide” - Annual assessment of press freedom in Europe by the partner organisations of the Safety of Journalists Platform](#), 2024, pp. 19, 59. The law was [adopted](#) in March 2024. See also Article 19, [“Croatia: Criminal Code Amendments – Prohibiting ‘unauthorised disclosure of information about criminal investigations’”](#), June 2024.

²⁷ Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 146.

²⁸ *ibid*, pp. 151-152.

FINLAND

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

“Police dispersed a number of protests that were disrupting traffic. There were regional inconsistencies in the policing of protests. Police failed to protect protesters, including from aggressive driving, in Kuusankoski and Jyväskylä in May and August [2023], respectively.

In February [2023], police unlawfully prohibited filming during a protest in Aalistunturi and in front of the Turkish embassy in Helsinki, where a photojournalist was detained and his camera memory card confiscated. In August [2023], at least one protester was arbitrarily detained in Jyväskylä.”²⁹

*See also further information on the right to freedom of assembly in Finland in Amnesty International’s report [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#).*³⁰

FRANCE

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

“Authorities repeatedly resorted to excessive, disproportionate and illegitimate restrictions on protests. Protesters were frequently subjected to arbitrary arrests and fines as well as confiscation of safety equipment, protest banners, pots, pans and amplifiers.

Local authorities often pre-emptively banned protests citing “public order” risks, without considering alternative options to facilitate peaceful assembly. In April, a Paris administrative tribunal overturned the latest in a series of sweeping banning orders declaring it a “manifestly illegal infringement of the right to protest ... not necessary or proportionate to the preservation of public order”.

In October [2023], the minister of interior issued a memo calling on local authorities to pre-emptively ban all Palestine solidarity protests, a disproportionate and discriminatory attack on the right to peaceful assembly. The ban was challenged before the Council of State, which determined that local authorities should judge public order risks on a case-by-case basis.

Dispersal of protests using force, including indiscriminate baton strikes, was often a tactic of first resort. In March [2023], the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about excessive force and the arbitrary arrest and detention of protesters and bystanders. The UN Special Rapporteur for Environmental Defenders condemned the “disproportionate” law enforcement response to an environmental protest in Sainte-Soline, which had caused many injuries. One protester required neurological treatment after being placed in a month-long induced coma and spending six weeks in intensive care.

In June [2023], UN rights experts expressed concern about excessive use of force against protesters, journalists and bystanders at pension reform and climate protests, including the use of stun grenades and teargas, and the firing of rubber bullets from moving vehicles.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed alarm at the injuries suffered by protesters, and urged reform of law enforcement accountability mechanisms.

In Mayotte, law enforcement officers unlawfully fired live ammunition towards the ground to disperse crowds during protests and unrest at the expulsion of undocumented migrants.”³¹

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 170.

³⁰ Amnesty International, [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#), 8 July 2024, pp. 73, 82, 92, 109, 124, 163.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 172-173.

In October 2023, Amnesty International France responded to “the request from the Minister of the Interior Gerald Darmanin asking the prefects in France to ban all pro-Palestinian demonstrations”, which “constitutes a serious and disproportionate attack on the right to demonstrate. [...] A ban can only be legal if it is motivated by a specific threat and if it is demonstrated that no other less restrictive measure could guarantee public order.”³²

*See also further information on the right to freedom of assembly in France in Amnesty International’s report [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#).*³³

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

“The Council of State annulled the government’s dissolution of environmental activist group Uprisings of the Earth, citing the need to respect the right to freedom of association. Members of the group had been labelled “eco terrorists” by the interior minister.

During a parliamentary hearing in April [2023], after the national Human Rights League had denounced excessive use of force by law enforcement, the interior minister suggested that the group’s funding should be scrutinized.”³⁴

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Amnesty International Secretary General Agnès Callamard responded to the September 2023 detention of investigative journalist Ariane Lavrilleux who reported on leaked documents alleging that French intelligence was used to target civilians in Egypt, stating that “It is deeply chilling that, almost two years after the revelations that France was allegedly complicit in the extrajudicial executions of hundreds of people in Egypt, it is the journalist who exposed these atrocities that is being targeted, rather than those responsible.”³⁵

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“The violent death of Vidadi Isgandarli must be effectively and promptly investigated. We call on the French authorities to consider all possible motives for his killing, including his criticism of the Azeri president and government, which was the reason for his exile. [...] This is the second time in recent years that an Azerbaijani living in exile in France has been the victim of a knife attack. The French government must ensure effective protection of individuals at risk who are seeking international protection in France.”³⁶

GEORGIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“The right to freedom of expression came under increased attack, especially following widespread demonstrations in March, which forced the government to recall the draft Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence targeting independent, foreign-funded organizations and media outlets as foreign agents of influence.

³² Amnesty International, “[Ban on protests supporting Palestinians is disproportionate attack on the right to protest in France](#)”, 16 October 2023.

³³ Amnesty International, “[‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#)”, 8 July 2024, pp. 48-50, 64, 66.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 173.

³⁵ Amnesty International, “[France: Attack on journalist attempt to cover up ‘pattern of complicity in serious human rights abuses’](#)”, 20 September 2023.

³⁶ Amnesty International, “[France/Azerbaijan: Killing of President Aliyev’s critic exposes failures to protect exiled activists](#)”, 2 October 2024.

In April [2023], parliament used newly adopted amendments to the parliamentary code of conduct for media, which require the consent of MPs for interviews, to suspend the accreditations of six journalists, reportedly in retaliation for their critical questions.

Human rights defenders and other civil society actors reported increased threats, smears and harassment for criticizing the government, as well as risks to physical safety. In July, at least six government critics reported being subjected to physical attacks that appeared coordinated. The attacks were publicly condoned by senior ruling party members. On 17 June [2023], students protesting at Tbilisi State University during a lecture by the ruling party chair were reportedly beaten by a group of government supporters. One of the students described being threatened by a police officer with a gun while in hospital. An investigation into the incident was pending at year's end.

In October [2023], several activists who took part in a training run by the NGO Center for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies, were called in for questioning by the security services, who claimed that the trainers were orchestrating the violent overthrow of the government. The organizers and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders dismissed the allegation as groundless and an attempt to smear civil society.”³⁷

In June 2024, Amnesty International reported “a violent attack by unknown men on a civic activist in Georgia just hours after he was accused in a social media post by the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament of participating in an ‘organized and politically motivated campaign of terror’.”³⁸

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

“The authorities increasingly used unnecessary and disproportionate force to break up peaceful protests and introduced new restrictive measures, particularly after widespread protests against the draft bill on transparency of foreign influence. By contrast, violent groups attacking members of the political opposition and the LGBTI community at Pride events, largely enjoyed impunity and were undeterred by police. On 17 October, the president vetoed an amendment to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations which would have prohibited protesters from erecting “temporary constructions” deemed “not essential” to the gathering, thereby placing undue restrictions on freedom of assembly.

During the largely peaceful protests against the bill on transparency of foreign influence, on 2 March [2023] police broke up a rally and arrested 36 people on administrative charges, including two journalists covering the demonstration. On 7-8 March [2023] police used tear gas and water cannons without prior warning against thousands protesting in front of parliament, arresting 146 on administrative charges. Dozens were fined between GEL500 (USD 190) and GEL 2,000 (USD 750) for petty hooliganism or disobeying police. At least one protester, Lazare Grigoriadis, was held in pretrial detention on charges of violence against police. Parliament withdrew the bill on 10 March.

On 2 June [2023], seven activists conducting a peaceful sit-in in front of parliament, holding banners and blank pieces of paper, were arrested by police, denied contact with their families or lawyers, and fined up to GEL2,000 (USD 750) for hooliganism and disobeying police.”³⁹

On [28 May 2024](#), “the Georgian parliament deci[ded] to override the presidential veto on the “foreign influence” bill, amid open threats by a top police official to peaceful protesters. [...] This malevolent piece of legislation must be scrapped immediately as it [...] The Georgian authorities have used intimidating tactics against those opposing the law, including threats, smear campaigns, illegal use of force by police, arbitrary arrests, beatings and other forms of ill-treatment

³⁷ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), pp. 176-177.

³⁸ Amnesty International, [“Georgia: Authorities must immediately investigate attacks on government critics”](#), 11 June 2024.

³⁹ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 177.

in custody. Dozens of peaceful protestors have been fined solely for participating in the protests, while there has been no accountability for the police's use of unlawful force in the streets."⁴⁰

"Activist Davit Katsarava was detained for protesting peacefully on 14 May. Police subjected him to beating, strangulation, and other degrading treatment, which they filmed on their phones. He was hospitalized with broken facial bones, severe head concussion and an eye injury."⁴¹

"Amnesty International calls on the Georgian authorities to drop the criminal charges carrying a disproportionate custodial sentence against protesters Omar Okribashvili and Saba Meparishvili, release them and conduct a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into their allegations of ill-treatment."⁴²

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In May 2024, "Georgia's ruling party proposed a discriminatory constitutional bill that, among other restrictions, bans any public expression of opinion or public gatherings that could be regarded as 'promoting same-sex relationships.'"⁴³

GERMANY

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

"In May [2023], the Berlin Assembly Authorities preemptively imposed blanket bans on protests in solidarity with the rights of Palestinians around the Nakba Remembrance Day in violation of the right to peaceful assembly. The grounds for the bans also violated the right to non-discrimination as they were based on stigmatizing and racist stereotypes of people perceived as Arab or Muslim. Also, after 7 October [2023], numerous protests in solidarity with Palestinians were preemptively banned. There were media reports of unnecessary and excessive use of force by police, hundreds of arrests and increased racial profiling of people perceived as Arab or Muslim in the context of these protests.

Ahead of the international automotive fair in September, at least 27 climate activists were placed in preventative detention for up to 30 days under Section 17 of the Bavarian Police Tasks Act, allowing the police to request detention without concrete suspicion of a crime or initiating a criminal proceeding.

There were several media reports of excessive use of force in policing peaceful protests, including pain compliance holds as a means of dispersing climate activists blocking streets.

Public Prosecutor's Offices in two federal states investigated climate activist groups under Section 129 of the Criminal Code, accusing them of forming a criminal organization. These investigations involved extensive search and surveillance measures, including the interception of a press telephone and the confiscation of personal data from support groups, creating a chilling effect on peaceful protest."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Override of veto on 'foreign influence' bill a 'tragic day for country'](#)", 29 May 2024; Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Dark day as parliament bulldozes adoption of repressive 'foreign influence' bill](#)", 14 May 2024; Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Authorities must immediately investigate attacks on government critics](#)", 11 June 2024; Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Authorities must address violent attacks against critics and bring perpetrators to justice](#)", 9 May 2024; Amnesty International, "[Georgia: authorities must stop using unlawful force against peaceful protesters and ensure accountability](#)", 3 May 2024.

⁴¹ Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Activist subjected to torture or other ill-treatment for protesting: Davit Katsarava](#)", 10 June 2024.

⁴² Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Release protesters, investigate allegations of ill-treatment](#)", 4 June 2024.

⁴³ Amnesty International, "[Georgia: Halt legislative assault on LGBTI rights](#)", 26 March 2024.

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), pp. 179-180.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“After 7 October [2023], a number of different restrictions on freedom of expression were imposed, particularly against those expressing solidarity with Palestinians. In November, the federal Ministry of Interior banned the phrase “from the river to the sea” as a symbol of Hamas, despite the slogan historically being used with a variety of different connotations and by different actors.”⁴⁵

GREECE

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

“Reports persisted of unlawful use of force in police operations, including the policing of demonstrations such as protests following the Tempi rail disaster in February [2023].

In June [2023], a court in the capital, Athens, convicted a police officer of torture in its “misdemeanour form” for beating a student during a Covid-19 check in Nea Smyrni square in March 2021. A second police officer was convicted as an accessory.

In November [2023], an appeals court found police responsible for the life-threatening injuries sustained by psychologist Yiannis Kafkas during a 2011 demonstration in Athens, and awarded him compensation.”⁴⁶

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“Human rights defenders continued to face criminalization for their work with refugees and migrants. Although misdemeanour charges against Sarah Mardini and Séan Binder were dropped in August [2023] by the Supreme Court, the following month they and 22 other defendants were indicted for four felonies including forming and membership of a criminal organization, and facilitating irregular entry.

Concerns remained about the criminal charges ongoing against Panayote Dimitras, spokesperson of the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), and Tommy Olsen, head of the NGO Aegean Boat Report, in relation to their work assisting refugees and migrants at Greece’s borders and reporting cases of border violence and unlawful returns. In January [2023], authorities imposed restrictive measures on Panayote Dimitras, although a ban on him working with the GHM was reversed in May [2023]. NGOs were also concerned about a smear campaign and judicial harassment of Panayote Dimitras.”⁴⁷

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In April [2023], it was reported that in December 2022 a court had accepted in part a civil lawsuit against journalist Stavroula Poulimeni and the independent media cooperative Alterthess, ordering the media outlet to pay EUR 3,000 in damages to a gold mining company’s senior executive. An appeal was filed against the ruling. The case, bearing the hallmarks of a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP), stemmed from an alleged breach of data protection laws after Stavroula Poulimeni reported on the executive’s conviction by a first instance court for environmental damage.”⁴⁸

HUNGARY

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

“Police used tear gas multiple times in April and May [2023] to disperse students protesting against controversial legislation to further centralize the public education system and silence

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

teachers voicing dissent. During a demonstration in May, police arrested and detained five protesters, four of them minors, for allegedly attacking police officers. Parliament adopted legislation dubbed the “Vengeance Act” in July [2023], further restricting teachers’ autonomy and silencing their criticism towards educational policies.

Teachers fired for participating in acts of civil disobedience in 2022 took the state to court, seeking to overturn their dismissals and secure compensation.

Police banned seven protests expressing solidarity with people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories under the pretext of protecting public safety, without meeting the legal threshold for the ban.

Despite severe criticism from the Council of Europe and NGOs, new legislation was adopted in December aiming to further silence critical voices and deter organizations from public participation in Hungary. The vaguely worded law created a new authority and tasked it with investigating organizations and individuals considered a “threat to national sovereignty”.⁴⁹

Human Rights Defenders working on LGBTI issues

“Fifteen EU member states and the European Parliament intervened through the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to support LGBTI rights in an ongoing infringement procedure against the so-called “Propaganda Law” adopted in 2021. This law banned the “promotion and portrayal of homosexuality and gender change” in linear media services. The court case was pending at the end of 2023.

Authorities began to implement sanctions under the propaganda law by issuing fines to bookshops that displayed books depicting homosexuality in their youth literature sections and failed to sell them in closed packaging. One company appealed against the decision; the case was pending at the end of 2023.

The Media Council refused to allow a TV commercial for the annual Budapest Pride festival and march on the grounds that it would “propagate homosexuality”. The organizers appealed against the decision; the case was pending at the end of 2023.

In July [2023], a rainbow-coloured bench inaugurated to celebrate Budapest Pride was vandalized several times by football club supporters and far-right activists. The perpetrators graffitied “Stop LGBTQ” at the scene, referring to the government’s ongoing homophobic and transphobic campaign. A police investigation regarding the hate incident was pending at the end of 2023.”⁵⁰

IRELAND

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

“No progress was made in addressing restrictions imposed by the Electoral Act 1997 (as amended in 2001) on the freedom of civil society organizations to access funding for campaigning purposes.”⁵¹

ITALY

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

“A government-backed bill to criminalize the defacing or damaging of heritage buildings and artifacts during demonstrations was under discussion in parliament. In April, the UN Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention criticized the bill and urged the authorities to refrain from disproportionately restricting peaceful acts of civil disobedience by

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 192.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, pp. 192-193.

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 211.

climate justice protesters. In November, another government-backed bill proposed harsher penalties for protesters involved in organizing road blocks in certain circumstances.

Police used excessive force against protesters on some occasions. In July [2023], in Piedmont, at a largely peaceful demonstration to oppose a high-speed railway project, police made unnecessary and indiscriminate use of tear gas.”⁵²

REFUGEES’ AND MIGRANTS’ RIGHTS

CRIMINALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY

“The case against the crews of the *Iuventa* and other NGO rescue ships before the tribunal of Trapani in Sicily for facilitating irregular migration in connection with rescue operations in 2016 and 2017 had not concluded by the end of the year. This preliminary hearing had already lasted 18 months.”⁵³

LATVIA

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“In January [2023], the authorities opened criminal proceedings for smuggling against two members of the NGO *I Want to Help Refugees*, for their work assisting refugees and migrants at the border.”⁵⁴

MALTA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In September [2023], the [Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights] noted that legislative proposals to strengthen freedom of expression were inadequate and that civil society and the media community had not been consulted on the amendments. Furthermore, concerns remained about journalists’ access to information.

In July [2023], a report by the European Commission criticized the review of the Freedom of Information Act and the obstacles faced by the media and citizens when requesting access to information held by public authorities.”⁵⁵

MOLDOVA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“The [May 2024] amendment to Moldova’s Criminal Code adopted by the parliament is alarming. The broadened definition of high treason is vague and open to abuse, posing a particular threat to the right to freedom of expression. This new definition of high treason could be used to target political dissent and critical voices under the guise of countering malevolent foreign influence. Worryingly, this law risks criminalizing views and opinions that should be protected under international law.”⁵⁶

⁵² *ibid*, p. 216.

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 218.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 235.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 256.

⁵⁶ Amnesty International, “[Moldova: New definition of high treason passed by parliament threatens freedom of expression](#)”, 31 May 2024.

MONTENEGRO

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“Press freedom improved, but journalists rarely received replies to freedom of information requests. Impunity persisted for attacks on journalists, including the 2004 murder of Duško Jovanović, editor of Dan newspaper.

In January [2023], the Appeals Court quashed proceedings against investigative journalist Jovo Martinović, wrongly convicted and imprisoned for drug trafficking.”⁵⁷

THE NETHERLANDS

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

“Throughout the year [of 2023], police used unlawful identity checks, as well as social media monitoring, drones and unannounced home visits, as surveillance tools against [peaceful protesters](#).

In August [2023], seven [climate protesters](#) were convicted for online posts calling on people to join peaceful demonstrations in the form of a roadblock on the A12 motorway. In March, May and September [2023], police used watercannons against protesters on the A12 and reported people attending with young children to a child safety hotline.

In November [2023], the IJS reported that authorities had failed to address serious threats and subsequent violence in 2022 directed by a hostile audience at anti-racism protesters in the municipality of Staphorst. The protesters were demonstrating against people dressing as the folkloric figure known as “[Black Pete](#)”. ”⁵⁸

NORTH MACEDONIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“A new Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation reduced fines imposed on journalists; however, investigative journalists were subjected to strategic lawsuits against public participation. In October [2023], Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia was fined for alleging that a former vice-president was responsible for air pollution.

Online threats against female journalists increased. The authorities had taken no action against a religious official who in July [2023] explicitly threatened to maim journalist Rita Behadini after she had criticized attacks on feminism by religious bodies.”⁵⁹

POLAND

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In December [2023] the newly appointed minister of culture and national heritage unilaterally dismissed the boards of several public broadcasters. Although public media needed urgent reform, the form of the intervention violated human rights standards with regard to freedom of expression.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 266.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 278.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 289.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 309.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In 2022, Amnesty International issued the report [“Poland: ‘They Treated Us Like Criminals’: From Shrinking Space to Harassment of LGBTI Activists”](#), documenting “the stories of those who uphold LGBTI rights and the repression they face for their peaceful actions” and showing “how Polish authorities not only inadequately protect, but add to harassment of LGBTI people.”⁶¹

*See also further information on the right to freedom of assembly in Poland in Amnesty International’s report [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#).*⁶²

PORTUGAL

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

“In February [2023] – two years after it emerged that, for over a decade, Lisbon City Council had been passing to foreign embassy officials the personal details of protesters demonstrating in front of embassies – three activists sued the municipality of Lisbon for alleged breaches of their rights. The case was brought one year after the National Data Protection Commission fined Lisbon City Council EUR 1,200,000 for 255 breaches of data law.”⁶³

ROMANIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

“In May [2023], parliament adopted a legislative proposal increasing criminal penalties for acts of “outrage” against public officials and “disturbing of public order and peace”, among other offences. These criminal offences lacked legal clarity and disproportionately restricted the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Around 50 NGOs had raised concerns in an open letter when the proposal was introduced in February. The President promulgated the law in July [2023].”⁶⁴

SERBIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In April [2023], eight European media organizations expressed fears that politicians’ overt hostility towards critical media, magnified by the tabloid press, normalized threats and attacks against independent journalists. Independent media reporting on the September events in Banjska were labelled traitors and enemies of the state. Those investigating organized crime and corruption were particularly at risk. In July, journalists’ organizations reported that online attacks were so widespread as to have become normal. The Independent Association of Journalists reported 11 physical attacks on journalists during the year; such reports were rarely investigated.

Investigative journalists, human rights defenders and activists were subjected to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). In May, the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network was ordered to pay damages after being found guilty of disclosing the identity of individuals – mostly close to the government – who had filed SLAPPs against it. In September, the Novi Sad court dismissed one of the five SLAPPs brought against Dragana Arsić and two environmental organizations protesting at companies’ incursions into the Fruška Gora national park.

⁶¹ Amnesty International, [“Poland: ‘They Treated Us Like Criminals’: From Shrinking Space to Harassment of LGBTI Activists”](#), 20 July 2022.

⁶² Amnesty International, [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#), 8 July 2024, pp. 25-26, 43.

⁶³ Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 310.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 315.

In August [2023], graffiti containing misogynistic threats against Sofija Todorović of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights appeared near her home, after she had voiced support for Kosovo's UN membership."⁶⁵

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

"In January [2023], the government opened a consultation on the [draft Law on Internal Affairs](#). This sought to legalize the use of biometric mass surveillance in public places, provide authorities with greater discretion to disperse public assemblies, and authorize an expansive list of methods of coercion against protesters, without specifying the threshold or circumstances in which they would be used. There was widespread use of CCTV and other forms of intrusive surveillance operated by both the state and private companies.

Demonstrations, especially environmental protests, were heavily policed, with participants frequently subjected to often unnecessary and excessive force. In March [2023], riot police were deployed to remove peaceful protesters attempting to stop tree-felling in advance of urban development in Novi Sad. The authorities routinely contracted private security companies, sometimes in plainclothes and without visible insignia, to "police" protests, often using unlawful force."⁶⁶

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

"In November [2023] it was revealed that sophisticated spyware was being used by "state-sponsored attackers" [against members of civil society](#)."⁶⁷

SLOVAKIA

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In June 2024, the Slovak parliament adopted "a proposed bill [seeking] to impose significant restrictions on the right to the freedom of peaceful assembly. [...] The proposed bill forms part of a package of legislative proposals known as the "lex assassination". [...] It is an attempt to use security and public order as pretexts to crack down on the right to peaceful assembly and strip people of their right to protest." This law risks "flagrantly violat[ing] the country's constitution and Slovakia's international human rights obligations."⁶⁸

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

"A bill that would label civil society organizations that receive more than 5,000 Euros a year in foreign funding as 'organizations with foreign support'" was approved at first reading by the Slovak Parliament in April 2024. "This bill is a full-frontal assault on civil society, including the functioning and very existence of many NGOs in Slovakia. If passed, it would place unreasonable and potentially fatal bureaucratic and financial burdens on civil society organizations. Those that survive could be demonized and discredited as a way to further hinder their activities."⁶⁹ The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern at the bill, and asked members of the National Council to refrain from adopting the bill as tabled.⁷⁰ The European Commission also warned Slovakia of that it would take immediate legal action if the law passed, stating that it would "launch an infringement procedure (for violation of EU law) immediately,"

⁶⁵ *ibid*, pp. 328-329.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 329.

⁶⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, "[Slovakia: Draconian bill restricting right to protest must be redrawn](#)", 18 June 2024.

⁶⁹ Amnesty International, "[Slovakia: Anti-NGO law a 'full-frontal assault on civil society'](#)", 30 April 2024.

⁷⁰ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, "[Letter to Slovak National Council on civil society and public broadcaster](#)", Ref: CommHR/MoF/sf 056-2024, 7 May 2024.

citing the earlier example of Hungary's similar law on foreign-funded NGOs, adopted in 2017, which was repealed in 2021 after the European Court of Justice ruled it illegal.⁷¹

SLOVENIA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

"In September [2023], the National Assembly adopted legislation to end legal proceedings initiated against individuals who defied certain restrictions, including on protests, enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic and ordered a refund of all fines paid.

In May [2023], the Constitutional Court lifted the suspension – in place since February [2023] – of amendments to the law on Radio-Television Slovenia (RTV SLO), regulating the composition of its governing board. Media organizations noted that the amendments would significantly reduce the possibility of political interference and allow RTV SLO to establish its editorial independence after years under the control of the previous governments."⁷²

SPAIN

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

"Authorities continued to misuse the Public Security Act to excessively limit the freedom of expression of demonstrators and journalists. Although fewer in number than in 2022, fines continued to be issued for vaguely defined administrative offences, such as "showing disrespect towards a law enforcement official" or "disobedience or resistance to the authorities or their agents".⁷³

SWEDEN

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

"Climate activists carrying out peaceful acts of civil disobedience continued to face harsh charges of sabotage, an offence punishable by imprisonment not used prior to 2022. Several activists were convicted of this offence, including one imprisoned in 2023."⁷⁴

SWITZERLAND

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

"A system requiring authorization for public assembly remained in force. Unauthorized peaceful protests were dispersed by force, including in the cities of Basel and Geneva.

In the cantons of Zurich and Basel-Stadt, the youth wing of a right-wing party launched a popular initiative seeking to further entrench the requirement for demonstrations to be authorized, and to introduce a mandatory financial liability for organizers. Despite opposition in the cantonal parliament, the initiative in Zurich was due to be put to a vote on 3 March 2024.

Since the beginning of the current armed conflict in Gaza, several German-speaking cities in Switzerland imposed temporary bans on demonstrations."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Reuters, "[EU warns Slovakia against foreign agent law for NGOs](#)", 24 July 2024.

⁷² Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 334.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 349.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 355.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 356-357.

See also further information on the right to freedom of assembly in Switzerland in Amnesty International's report [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#).⁷⁶

TÜRKIYE

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“In the immediate aftermath of the February [2023] earthquakes the authorities restricted access to Twitter and TikTok. They detained at least 257 people for criticizing the government's earthquake response, including journalists and some people based solely on their social media posts.

The prosecution continued of 15 journalists, including the co-chair of the Dicle Fırat Journalists' Association, on charges of “membership of a terrorist organization”. In July they were conditionally released from 13 months' pretrial detention in the city of Diyarbakır.

In July [2023], T24 editor Sibel Yüklér, Mezopotamya Agency reporters Delal Akyüz and Fırat Can Arslan, Bianet editor Evrim Kepenek and freelance journalist Evrim Deniz were detained and accused of “targeting a public official involved in the fight against terrorism”. The charge related to their social media posts concerning the relocation of a prosecutor and a judge, a married couple, who had both been assigned to the prosecution of 15 journalists in Diyarbakır (see above). Fırat Can Arslan became the first journalist remanded in pretrial detention on charges under Article 6 of the antiterrorism law; he was acquitted and released at the first hearing on 31 October [2023].

In September [2023], the mayor of Antalya Municipality cancelled the 60th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, and dismissed the festival director, following disputes over the screening of a documentary entitled *The Decree*. The film depicted public sector workers who had been summarily dismissed following the failed coup in 2016.”⁷⁷

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

“On 11 November [2023], the Saturday Mothers/People, a group of human rights defenders including relatives of victims of enforced disappearances, were allowed to read a short statement near [Galatasaray Square](#) in Istanbul, a place of symbolic importance to the group, after being banned from doing so for over five years. This positive development fell short of constitutional court decisions that the group's freedom of assembly should be upheld, and between April and November law enforcement officials had continued to use unlawful force to disperse their protests and detain and prosecute participants.

A number of peaceful Pride marches took place despite blanket bans in at least six provinces and four districts across the country. At least 224 people were arbitrarily detained during the Pride season, including bystanders, children, lawyers, journalists, university students, human rights defenders and foreign nationals.

On 20 July [2023], law enforcement officials prevented several commemorations of the 2015 killing of 33 people in the south-eastern town of Suruç in a bombing by the armed group Islamic State. At least 187 protesters were arbitrarily detained in the cities of Istanbul, İzmir and Ankara. In Istanbul authorities kettled protesters, using pepper spray, plastic bullets and unlawful force.

Between July and September [2023], police used unlawful force, water cannon and pepper spray at close range against ecological activists protesting at the felling of thousands of trees to expand a coal mine in Akbelen forest in Muğla province. At least 50 activists were detained then later

⁷⁶ Amnesty International, [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#), 8 July 2024, pp. 23, 68, 71, 84-85, 92-94, 98, 126, 127, 144, 181, 184, 205.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 375-376.

released, although some were subjected to travel restrictions and three were banned from entering Milas district in Muğla province.”⁷⁸

“Ahead of Pride season [2024], research by Amnesty International reveal[ed] how, in 2023, Turkish authorities imposed blanket bans and other discriminatory restrictions on Pride marches, using unnecessary and arbitrary force which in some cases amounted to torture. Anti-LGBTI rhetoric from senior government figures increased prejudice and emboldened anti-LGBTI groups. [...] [Discriminatory restrictions and abuse during Türkiye Prides](#) analyses state responses to peaceful gatherings during the 2023 Pride season (7 June to 9 July). Authorities announced blanket bans on many marches and public events, and even without official bans, law enforcement officials prevented LGBTI people from peacefully gathering.”⁷⁹ “In September [2023], for the second year running, the state broadcasting body RTÜK endorsed an advertisement promoting an anti-LGBTI rights demonstration in Istanbul which targeted so-called “LGBTI propaganda”.⁸⁰

“In October 2023, Türkiye’s Constitutional Court ruled that the right to peaceful assembly of DİSK (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Trade Unions), during the May Day celebrations in Taksim in 2014 and 2015 had been violated by the bans and forceful dispersals of protesters by law enforcement officials.” Yet, “[o]n 23 April 2024, the Governor of Istanbul Davut Gül stated that trade unions would not be permitted to assemble in Taksim Square. On 29 April 2024, the Minister of the Interior also said that the square is not suitable for assemblies and that May Day protests would not be allowed to take place. They claim that Taksim’s location and the heavy traffic would make it difficult to ensure the protection of rights and freedoms and also refer to risks of “terror attacks”. [...] The decade-long, baseless restrictions on peaceful assemblies in Taksim Square must be finally lifted. The Turkish authorities must ensure that they fulfil their duty to enable peaceful assemblies to take place. They must also take all necessary steps to protect participants’ enjoyment of their rights.”⁸¹

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

“[In 2023,] Türkiye remained on the “grey list” of the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force, while continuing to use its recommendations on combating money laundering and financing terrorism as a smokescreen to facilitate harassment of NGOs. The authorities intensified the use of intrusive NGO audits under the Law on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

In September [2023], a court rejected a lawsuit seeking the closure of the NGO We Will Stop Femicides Platform for alleged “illegal and immoral activities ... damaging the Turkish family structure under the guise of defending women’s rights.”

The prosecution of at least 15 members of the Migration Monitoring Association accused of “membership of a terrorist organization” continued at the end of the year, as did proceedings to close the association for allegedly “operating in line with the goals and objectives of an armed terrorist group”.

The 2021 case to close the second biggest opposition party, the People’s Democratic Party, and impose a five-year political ban on 451 former and current members, was still pending at the end of the year.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 376; Amnesty International, [‘Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries’](#), 8 July 2024, p.66.

⁷⁹ Amnesty International, [“Türkiye: Discriminatory restrictions and violence against Pride protesters must not be repeated”](#), 17 May 2024; Amnesty International, [“Türkiye: 2023 Prides Took Place Amid Discriminatory Restrictions and Abuse of the Rights of Protesters”](#), 17 May 2024.

⁸⁰ Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 378.

⁸¹ Amnesty International, [“Türkiye: Unlawful ban on May Day celebrations in Istanbul must be lifted”](#), 30 April 2024.

In November [2023], a civil court in Ankara dismissed the 11 members of the Central Council of the Turkish Medical Association for “having acted outside of the founding aims of the Association”. The decision was pending on appeal at the end of the year.”⁸²

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“In January [2023], Şebnem Korur Fincancı was convicted of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” and sentenced to 32 months’ imprisonment for calling for an independent investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2022. She was released pending appeal.

In June [2023], Istanbul Heavy Penal Court No. 35 [overturned the 2020 convictions](#) of Özlem Dalkıran, Idil Eser, Taner Kılıç and Günel Kurşun, four human rights defenders in the so-called Büyükada prosecution, for “lack of evidence”, in line with the earlier Court of Cassation judgment. A prosecution appeal against the acquittal of Taner Kılıç was pending at the end of the year.

The courts again failed to implement judgments by the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş, despite Türkiye facing an infringement proceeding for its refusal to release Osman Kavala. Furthermore, in September [2023], Türkiye’s highest court of appeals [upheld the life sentence against Osman Kavala](#) and 18-year jail sentences against Çiğdem Mater, Can Atalay, Mine Özerden and Tayfun Kahraman, despite the prosecuting authorities’ repeated failure to provide any evidence. The convictions of Mücella Yapıcı, Hakan Altınay and Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi were overturned.

In August, Celalettin Can was imprisoned to serve a 15-month sentence. A participant in the 2016 solidarity campaign with the now closed Kurdish daily newspaper Özgür Gündem, he remained in prison until his conditional release on 19 December [2023].”⁸³

IMPUNITY

On 12 June 2024, “three police officers were cleared of ‘causing death by culpable negligence’ in the killing of prominent human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi. [...] Almost nine years after Tahir Elçi was killed in broad daylight, this verdict is a huge blow to his family and the wider human rights community in Türkiye. The decision brings into sharper focus the failure of the authorities to conduct a thorough, prompt, independent and impartial investigation into his killing, which has allowed those responsible for it to evade justice.”⁸⁴

UKRAINE

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“Derogation from the right to freedom of expression, alongside other rights, remained in place.

According to the OHCHR, the UN human rights office, as of July, criminal proceedings had been opened in over 2,000 cases under Article 436-2 of the criminal code of Ukraine: “...justification, recognition as legitimate and denial of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and glorification of its participants”. This disproportionate restriction of the right to freedom of expression had led to 443 convictions between March 2022 and November 2023, according to Ukrainian media, with many resulting in non-custodial sentences. An example of this offence was calling the war an “internal civil conflict”.

Criminal proceedings under Article 436-2 were opened in August against Yuriy Sheliazhenko, a cofounder and leader of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement. An advocate of the right to

⁸² Amnesty International, [The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024](#), pp. 376-377.

⁸³ *ibid*, p. 377.

⁸⁴ Amnesty International, [“Türkiye: Acquittal of three police officers for involvement in killing of human rights lawyer a huge blow to justice”](#), 12 June 2024.

conscientious objection, he was accused of "justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine". His home was searched, and he was placed under a night curfew pending trial."⁸⁵

RUSSIAN-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

"The right to freedom of expression was further suppressed. Any sign of disloyalty to Russia, including possession of Ukraine-related content on personal electronic devices, such as exchange of messages with family members in government-controlled Ukraine, was monitored and penalized, including via enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, interrogation, ill-treatment, and threat of deportation. Representatives of Ukrainian local authorities were intimidated into attending public gatherings in support of the occupation through violence and threats against their relatives."⁸⁶

UNITED KINGDOM

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

"In May [2023], parliament passed the Public Order Act, furthering a legislative crackdown on peaceful protest that started with the 2022 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. The Public Order Act criminalized various forms of peaceful protest, such as "locking on", expanded police stop-and-search powers, created protest banning orders, and gave the Home Secretary powers to seek civil injunctions against peaceful protesters.

In June [2023], the Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations were passed. This secondary legislation expanded the circumstances in which police can impose conditions on protests, backed by prison sentences. Conditions can be anything police consider necessary to prevent "serious disruption", defined in the regulations as an obstruction causing "more than minor hindrance to day-to-day activities".

In May [2023], dozens of peaceful protesters were arrested at and around the coronation of King Charles III, including pre-emptive arrests. The majority of charges were subsequently dropped.

Arrests, prosecutions and imprisonment of peaceful environmental protesters continued throughout 2023. In some instances, protesters charged with offences were prevented by judges from referencing climate change or other environmental concerns in their defence to the jury. Those who ignored such orders faced prosecution for contempt of court and prison sentences.

Following the Hamas attacks in Israel on 7 October [2023], and the subsequent Israeli bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza, regular large-scale, non-violent protests occurred calling for a ceasefire. The then Home Secretary and other government ministers sought to pressure police to ban these protests, characterizing them as "hate marches". Police leaders responded that they lacked the legal powers to ban the protests. The government indicated its intention to legislate to further expand policing powers to intervene against non-violent protests.

Some people in the UK on temporary visas had their leave to remain curtailed because of their involvement in pro-Palestine protests."⁸⁷

"After years of Julian Assange's life being wrongly stolen by the US and UK authorities, Amnesty International welcomes the positive news that he is now free and can be reunited with his family. Had he been extradited to the US, he would have been at risk of human rights violations, including prolonged solitary confinement in contravention of the prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment, and poor health services. [...] The US' relentless prosecution of Assange has done untold damage

⁸⁵ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 385.

⁸⁶ Amnesty International, [The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024](#), p. 387.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 391.

to media freedom, highlighting the need to continue fighting for freedom of expression everywhere. [...] Assange was wanted for activities that are fundamental to all journalists and publishers, who often receive sensitive government information from outside sources. The public has a right to know when a government is wrongdoing in its name.”⁸⁸

REGIONAL TRENDS

“Across Europe, the right to peaceful assembly is under severe attack as states increasingly stigmatize, criminalise and crack down on peaceful protesters, imposing unjustified and punitive restrictions and resorting to ever more repressive means to stifle dissent.” In a July 2024 report, [Under-protected and over-restricted: The state of the right to protest in 21 European countries](#) Amnesty International “reveals a continent-wide pattern of repressive laws, use of unnecessary or excessive force, arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, unwarranted or discriminatory restrictions as well as the increasing use of invasive surveillance technology, resulting in a systematic roll back of the right to protest.” The report covers 21 European countries, namely: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and the UK. “The report finds widespread use of excessive and/or unnecessary use of force by the police against peaceful protesters, including use of less-lethal weapons. [...] In some countries, the use of force amounted to torture or other ill-treatment, and in [9 of the countries covered by the report,] excessive use of force was used by law enforcement against children. [...] Amnesty International “identifie[d] a disturbing trend of stigmatization by authorities aimed at delegitimizing protesters and protests. [...] Peaceful acts of civil disobedience have increasingly been framed as a threat to public order and/or national security, giving authorities a spurious pretext to impose restrictions and sidestep international human rights obligations. [...] Indiscriminate mass surveillance, heavy-handed policing, burdensome requirements and the risk of criminal sanctions create fear and discourage participation in assemblies. This ‘chilling effect’ disproportionately impacts people from racialised and marginalized groups.”⁸⁹

“There have been alarming attempts by authorities across Europe to silence those who speak out against the killing by Israel of tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza, dare to criticize crimes and violations by Israeli forces, or highlight the [risk of genocide](#).⁹⁰ Law enforcement officers across Europe have also targeted people who have spoken out against states’ policies, including the ongoing provision of arms to Israel for use in its unlawful attacks in the occupied Gaza Strip. Public assemblies, meetings and cultural events organized across Europe denouncing Israel’s policies on Gaza have been cancelled or banned, having a ‘chilling effect’ that is deterring other expressions of solidarity with Palestinians’ human rights.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Amnesty International, [“Fight for media freedom continues as Assange reaches plea deal with US authorities”](#), 26 June 2024.

⁸⁹ Amnesty International, [“Europe: Sweeping pattern of systematic attacks and restrictions undermine peaceful protest”](#), 8 July 2024; Amnesty International, [“Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The state of the right to protest in 21 European countries”](#), 8 July 2024.

⁹⁰ Amnesty International, [“Israel must comply with key ICJ ruling ordering it do all in its power to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza”](#), 26 January 2024.

⁹¹ Amnesty International, [“Europe: Authorities must protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly ahead of Nakba Remembrance Day”](#), 10 May 2024.