

# Human Rights Commissioner: Annual Activity Report



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

**András Csúri**

**News**

On 21 April 2020, The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, *Dunja Mijatović*, published her [2019 annual activity report](#) covering the main problems, challenges, and opportunities European countries are facing in the field of human rights. In the current context, the Commissioner particularly warns that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating long-standing problems.

The report covers topics that particularly illustrate the ongoing backlash in Europe.

In the context of the growing political and social acceptance of racism, the Commissioner underlines the alarming extent of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Gypsyism. These include hate speech and crimes, especially collective attacks, against Roma; the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and attacks on Holocaust memorials; or attacks on Muslim women for wearing face veils and headscarves.

As far as the disregard of the human rights of migrants and refugees is concerned, the Commissioner expresses concerns over the increasing normalisation of illegal pushbacks, as well as acts aimed at dehumanising people attempting to cross borders. The lives of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers have also been put at risk by decisions to reduce state search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean as well as by outsourcing border controls to third countries with poor human rights records and unsafe conditions. Here, there is need for more transparency and accountability.

As regards gender inequality, progress is slow in bridging the gender pay gap, addressing discrimination at work, and tackling women's underrepresentation in political decision-making.

The repression of freedom of speech and dissent is also common, for example through disproportionate use of force by the police, through hostile work environments of human rights defenders and journalists in a growing number of European countries, and through legislation being misused to detain and prosecute them.

Judicial independence is in a state of increasing erosion through the attempts by some national authorities to use their leverage to influence and instruct the judiciary as well as to threaten judges for using their right to freedom of expression to state their opinion about an issue of public interest in the justice field.

Lastly, the Commissioner points out some new challenges, e.g. the balance between technological development and human rights protection. She warns against the risks the unregulated use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence poses to human rights, in particular privacy, equality, as well as freedom of expression and assembly.

## **AUTHOR**

**András Csúri**

Vienna University of Economics  
and Business

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The report further summarised the following:

- The Commissioner's activities against inequality faced by persons with disabilities, older persons, Roma, and LGBTI individuals;
- The Commissioner's country work through visits and missions;
- The Commissioner's cooperation with European and international organisations.

Regarding the latter, the Commissioner met with the Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in order to exchange views, including on ongoing activities in the field of asylum and immigration as well as artificial intelligence. The Commissioner also participated in a side-event on Communicating Human Rights organised by the EU representation to the CoE, with the participation of the EU FRA Director. The Commissioner also met with the European Union Special Representative on Human Rights, with their exchange of views focusing on their respective work in Member States of common interest.

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