

Netherlands Helsinki Committee Annual Report 2019
Building and securing justice across Europe



Access to Justice

Criminal Justice Reform

Human Rights Defence

Integrity and Accountability



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The NHC: Building and securing justice and compliance with international human rights agreements

This year's annual report looks at our work through the eyes of direct and indirect partners and through our own reflections. You will get to know our four programmes: Access to Justice, Criminal Justice Reform, Human Rights Defence, and Integrity and Accountability, through feature interviews and summaries of the year. But before diving in, I want to take this opportunity to point out three developments of which I am particularly proud.

First, in February, Gaston Starreveld from the National Postcode Lottery surprised us with the amazing news that the NHC received a €1 million one-off grant! We are very grateful to all those who participate in the National Postcode Lottery: your contributions will help us work towards greater human rights understanding amongst the general public and cooperation

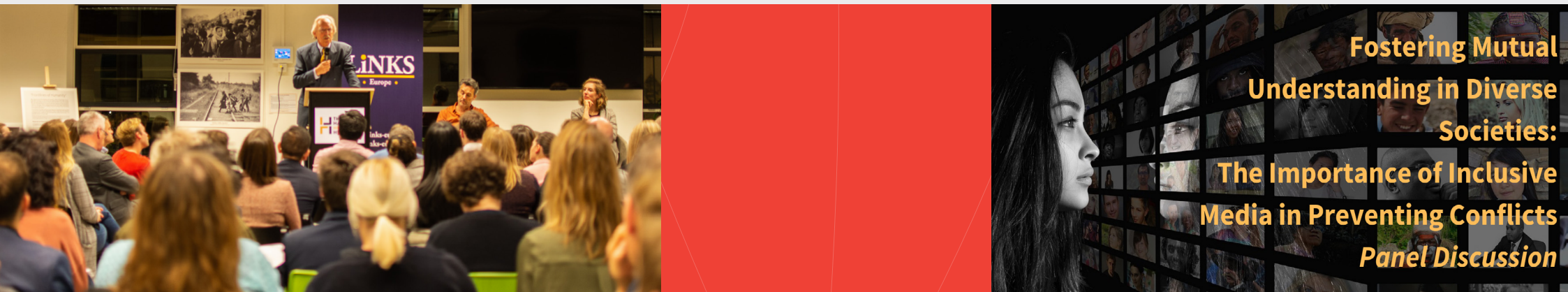
amongst civil society. It will also strengthen the ability of civil society organisations throughout the Europe to monitor the independence of the judiciary so that the rule of law is upheld.

Second, the longest continuously running activity of the NHC, the Security & Human Rights Monitor (originally called the Helsinki Monitor and Security & Human Rights Journal) is about to release the 30th volume of its journal. In the last few years, we have worked hard to modernise the Monitor, with the creation of a new all-encompassing website where readers can get news, analysis, opinions, interviews, and in-depth journal articles on the OSCE and topics covering the intersection between security and human rights. We have also hosted public events in The Hague to reach a broader public interested in the themes of the Monitor.

Left: Pepijn Gerrits, NHC Executive Director / Chair of the Board.

Right: Gaston Starreveld of the Dutch Postcode Lottery paying a surprise visit to the NHC office in The Hague. Photo by Roy Beusker Fotografie.





Third, this year's establishment of four NHC programmes – Access to Justice, Criminal Justice Reform, Human Rights Defence, and Integrity and Accountability – marks a significant shift in how the NHC works towards our mission: **Building and securing justice and compliance with international human rights agreements.** Our new programmes will go beyond specific changes, accomplished through projects, such as capacity building activities for civil servants, advocating for the release of a particular human rights defender, or the establishment of mentoring programmes for juvenile detainees. They will now pursue broader, systemic change in the areas of human rights and rule of law. They will build on the achievements of individual projects, amounting to wider societal change in the region in which we work.

The **Access to Justice Programme** will work to ensure individuals are able to protect themselves against violations of their rights. **Criminal Justice Reform** will improve the chances offenders have to be a successful part of society, so they are less likely to reoffend, and everyone in society

is safer. **Human Rights Defence** will help foster a resilient civil society by promoting a cultural shift in which everyone in society recognizes the importance of, and applies human rights to their own lives. **Integrity and Accountability** will promote professional shifts in civil servants to combat corruption and nepotism, so democratic societies can flourish. **Through targeted projects, the programme teams will be able to apply their specific expertise and contribute to changes in the respective societies where we work.**

All in all, 2019 has been a year in which the NHC has contributed to effective responses towards global challenges, such as countering nationalism, working towards universal adherence to human rights agreements and supporting the independence of the judiciary for the robust rule of law. We aim to continue this work in the years to come.

Pepijn Gerrits

Executive Director / Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Left: Piet de Klerk speaking at The Hague Conversations on Conflict: Human Right and Conflict. Photo by Louise Alves.

Right: Poster for the panel discussion hosted by the Security and Human Rights Monitor, in cooperation with the [OSCE HCNM](#) and [SPIL](#).

NHC at a Glance

Programmes by Country 2015 – 2019

- Criminal Justice Reform
- Access to Justice
- Human Rights Defence
- Integrity and Accountability

Total Activities per Programme* 2015 – 2019

Criminal Justice Reform

97

52 Trainings
32 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Access to Justice

37

15 Trainings
22 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Human Rights Defence

17

10 Trainings
7 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Integrity and Accountability

27

21 Trainings
16 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges



*Figures based on survey of annual narrative reports from 2015 to 2019.

Who We Are and Where We Came From



Who We Are: The Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Our mission is to build and secure justice and compliance with international human rights agreements within OSCE participating states. Established in 1987, we represented Dutch civil society in the **Helsinki Movement**. For over 30 years, we have helped build bridges between public institutions, international organisations, practitioners, and civil society. We look at the big picture, taking a holistic approach in strengthening rule of law, safeguarding human rights, and strengthening civil society.

Where We Came From: The H in NHC

The **Helsinki Movement** refers to the human rights movement that followed the 1975 signing of the Helsinki Accords. In an era of tension amidst the Cold War, the Accords contained the ground-breaking concept of comprehensive security: the notion that **real security is achieved by building democratic, free, and rights-respecting societies**. The inclusion of civil society in the process and beyond, today allows actors to hold governments accountable for implementing the Helsinki principles of upholding **rule of law** and **human rights**.

NHC Programmes: Feature Interviews and Highlights



Access to Justice

Civil society and police cooperating for positive change in society – Experiences from Albania

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Criminal Justice Reform

Promoting rehabilitation rather than retribution in criminal justice – Thoughts from the field in Ukraine and Kosovo

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Human Rights Defence

Breaking silos – Why we believe in mainstreaming human rights

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Integrity and Accountability

What is the importance of the rule of law? – An Armenian Perspective

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Access to Justice Programme

We believe access to justice is a fundamental principle of the rule of law and democracy. It allows individuals to protect themselves against violations of their rights, to repair civil injustices, to hold decision-makers accountable and challenge charges against them in criminal proceedings. Although access to justice should be guaranteed for all individuals, **particularly vulnerable groups continue to face barriers in exercising their rights throughout Europe.** The Access to Justice Programme breaks down these barriers by applying a rights based approach, ensuring the rights of vulnerable groups that entering in the (criminal) justice system are fully respected.



*Above: LGBT Supporter in Tirana, Albania. Courtesy www.historia-ime.com
Left: Stari most, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photo by Anton Sharov on [Unsplash](https://www.unsplash.com).*

Feature Interview

Civil society and police cooperating for positive change in society – Experiences from Albania

In Albania, despite legislation on LGBTI rights being largely in place, and in line with international standards, implementation continues to be an issue, particularly in rural areas. We are working to strengthen police and justice chain response to hate crimes and discrimination against the LGBTI community. Our partner, **Sidita Zaja**, Executive Director of the NGO Pro LGBT in Albania discusses the changes made through our project, and how cooperation with the Albanian police is going.

What change in society do you want to see and hope to move towards through this project?

Our vision is for the LGBTI community is to have a healthy family life, to be able to adopt, and to be able to create a family and marry. Our goal is having the rights of people from the LGBTI community respected, and when they are not respected, ensuring the incident goes through the legal system properly and any violations of rights are remedied.

From the part of the police, we want them to treat relevant cases as hate crimes. In Albania, we already have laws on hate crimes but they are still relatively new. If there were more cases of reported hate crimes,

this would make society understand that a crime committed because of prejudice is against the law.

Pride Parades in Tirana have always been peaceful, but they have always been centred in the capital and we want to change that. We want LGBTI peoples in other cities to feel safe – the police are a first step, though getting people to understand gender identity, sexual orientation and accepting it in their culture will take time.

What are some of the obstacles faced by the LGBTI community in accessing justice?

We see a lack of trust, and the idea that they would be ‘outed’ by going to the police ... this assumption is less true because some police officers have been trained in these matters.

How has the cooperation between Civil Society Organisations and the Albanian police improved with this project?

Before we only had contact with the police in Tirana and now we have contact point in different regions. This is very helpful when it comes to cases from different regions. We have also spent an enormous amount of time with them, connecting



Above: Sidita Zaja, PRO LGBT Executive Director.

“Our vision is for LGBTI people to have healthy family life, be able to adopt, be able to create a family and marry.”

Sidita Zaja



more on a personal level. This is very important in the Albanian context, because as a society we work informally. We went to the Netherlands together, had meetings in Tirana, these kinds of interactions and building this network with the police has been the best thing for us in civil society.

In addition to improved cooperation with the police, what other changes have you seen?

There has been more awareness raised from different parts of society towards the LGBTI community. There is also an increased capacity amongst police officers for dealing with LGBTI cases.

As mentioned, we thought of the police as a scary institution, now we as civil society have changed our minds when it comes approaching the police. So far, the change is something you can touch and see. There have also been LGBTI community members at the trainings that have met the police and they can tell that things are going in the right direction.

Is there a particular story or experience from these communications that has stayed with you during the project?

During a training on appropriate responses the younger generation police were very honest about how they have reacted to LGBTI cases. One police officer said that it was really good to have these trainings, so that now he knows what the other person goes through. I admired the courage it took to describe things as they really are and to make other colleagues think about it as well.

Another thing is that when we [ProLGBT Albania and representatives of the Albanian Police] were in the Netherlands on Pink Saturday, an LGBTI festival. On a personal level, the police really liked the experience and they found it really admirable how the Dutch police were providing safety and staff. They were impressed with the harmony they saw on Pink Saturday and would like to see that in Albania: the cooperation between the LGBTI community, organising NGOs, the police – but also the community at large that came to the event. They liked that kind of harmony and freedom ... it gave them hope. [Read the interview in full here](#)

Left: Albanian Police representatives with Dutch counterparts during their visit to Venlo for Pink Saturday.

Centre: Pink Saturday in Venlo, photo courtesy of Julian Buijzen.

Right: Albanian participants from various branches of government, the Police, NGOs and their Dutch counterparts meet in Tirana.

2019 Programme Highlights and Activities

We continued our work on Countering Discrimination and Protecting LGBTI Rights in Albania. Together with partners, we worked on improving the response of the justice system to incidents of LGBTI hate crime and discrimination in order to ensure their rights are respected. We did this by bringing together Dutch and Albanian police so they could talk to each other about how to tackle these sorts of crimes. We also contributed to strengthening coordination amongst all actors that make up the justice chain: police, prosecution, judges, lawyers, and civil society organisations so that are able to work together more effectively.

In the Balkans Act Now project, through improved dialogue and cooperation with their governments, human rights institutions, and equality bodies, mechanisms were established for monitoring and reporting on human trafficking in the Western Balkan countries. We improved the ways through which civil society can influence an adequate government response and helped to ensure the rights of those subject to human trafficking are better protected.

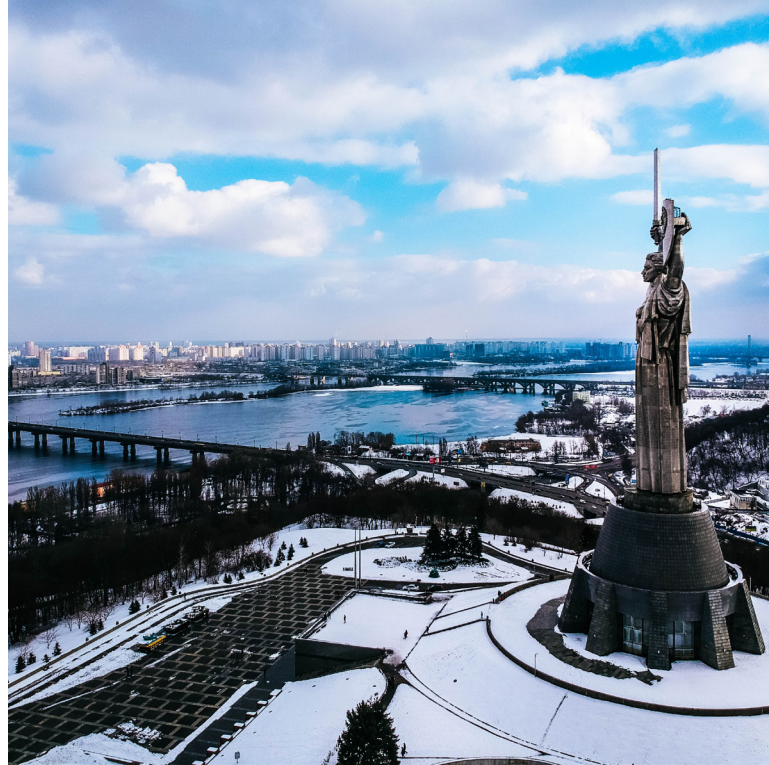
Through setting up the Legal Expertise and Advisory Board (LEAP) network in Kosovo, we promoted procedural rights, ensuring individuals are treated fairly and equally by the courts when undergoing trial. Coordinated by our partner Fair Trials, LEAP in Kosovo facilitated exchanges between network members and other actors in the justice system from the Netherlands and Kosovo to improve procedures in courts so that citizens' rights are guaranteed.

Below left: Albanian police representatives at the Police Academy Apeldoorn with NHC Project Manager, Annemiek van Goor. **Below right:** LEAP members from Kosovo and the Netherlands meet in Pristina to discuss fair trials.



Criminal Justice Reform Programme

We believe a criminal justice system focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment is better at contributing to safer societies. The Criminal Justice Programme promotes and supports criminal justice reform that works to ensure offenders are able to successfully re-enter society and do not re-offend. By providing tools and trainings to prison staff or probation officers, we help improve the implementation of justice. By bringing together high-level officials, policy experts, and seasoned practitioners from different countries, we contribute to the development of the most effective policies and practices. We also promote collaboration between different actors in the justice system, such as judges, prosecutors, probation, and prison, to ensure reforms pursued are effectively implemented throughout the entire system.



*Above: Prishtina, Kosovo.
Courtesy W.J. Gauthier on Flickr.
[Link](#) | [CC License](#)*

*Left: Kyiv Skyline. Courtesy Denys
Rodionenko on Unsplash.*

Feature Interviews

Promoting rehabilitation rather than retribution in criminal justice – Thoughts from the field in Ukraine and Kosovo

Ukraine: Working together to develop probation

Since the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution, Ukraine has been working towards significant justice reform. We have been working with the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice, judges, prosecutors, probation workers, and international experts to further the country's young probation system. In this interview with Head of PR for Latvian Probation **Imants Mozers (IM)**, Dutch Probation Manager **Jochum Wildeman (JW)**, and NHC Programme Manager **Koen Goei (KG)**, they discuss the advantages of international collaboration and the importance of working with the right partners.

Jochum and Imants, you are both probation professionals with busy work schedules in your own countries. What benefits are there for you to participate in this international collaboration project in Ukraine?

JW: As a Dutch Probation professional, I can learn from working with my Ukrainian counterparts, and seeing how they approach certain aspects of their work. More generally, I find people often think that working with different cultures

will be challenging. But I have found that not to be true. It has been quite easy to work with people from different backgrounds, and it has been a positive experience. Every time I go to Ukraine, or other countries, I see – if you have an open mind – how easy it is to work together, learn from each other, and implement best practices.

IM: Throughout my professional career, the biggest lessons I've learned were in international projects. This project in Ukraine gives me the opportunity to look at my own work in Latvia from an outside perspective. It can help me find ways to be more effective in my work back home.

KG: In the Netherlands, we have this culture of coming together and jointly looking for solutions. The benefit of jointly looking for solutions – and including more viewpoints – is through an exchange of viewpoints, you get the best result.

How has this project been an example of the importance of working with the right partners?

KG: Our probation system in the Netherlands is about 200 years old. For a Dutch probation communications specialist,



*Above (left to right):
Koen Goei, Imants Mozers, and Jochum
Wildeman at a meeting in a probation
office in Amsterdam.*

*“This project in
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It can help me find
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work back home.”*

Imants Mozers



it is hard to imagine a situation in which probation is brand new in the criminal justice system and in the broader society, and to work with zero budget. Therefore, I thought we should work with someone who had the experience of seeing the beginning of probation in his country – when nobody in criminal justice or the public knew what it was. Latvia was in a similar position to Ukraine ten to fifteen years ago, so I thought Imants would be a great fit.

Imants, can you tell me about your experience doing communications for the new system of probation in Latvia and where it is today?

IM: In Latvian probation there were initial failures in public relations. This led to the development of myths among the general public that probation is lenient. Together with my colleagues, I dedicated quite some time, a few years actually, to rebuilding trust and making probation look professional and relevant. Today probation in Latvia is one of the most

respected institutions in the field of justice and is widely accepted by public. This allows us to be more creative in how we interact with the general public on topics related to probation. At the same time, this gives us more freedom to make bolder alliances with the general public, involving them in our initiatives.

Left: Ukrainian probation representatives discussing communications with Imants Mozers, in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Kosovo: Improving Chances Post-Release for Juvenile Detainees

Countries in the Western Balkans have been working on reforming their criminal justice systems, in part to comply with EU criteria in a run up to joining the EU in the future. For decades, the NHC has been assisting the efforts of these countries in transforming their prison regimes from punitive systems to those that pursue the successful reintegration of prisoners into society upon being released. We worked together with prison staff and civil society to implement reforms in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia aimed at improving the possibilities for juvenile detainees. NHC partner **Nehat Thaçi**, Director General of the Kosovo Correctional Service discusses what changes have been implemented, and the importance of prison reform for all parts of society.

What is the current situation of prisons in Kosovo? Why is Kosovo pursuing prison reform?

The current situation of prisons in Kosovo is better than it was in the past. Many improvements and changes have been made to the physical and legal infrastructure of correctional facilities.

The reforms aim to bring human rights standards in Kosovo prisons closer in line to those in the EU.

Also under consideration are reforms that would incorporate recommendations and requests from various international monitoring mechanisms. These are aimed at addressing challenges or problems facing prisons in Kosovo.

What kind of prison reforms have you worked on with the NHC?

The Kosovo Correctional Service, especially the juvenile Correctional Center in Lipjan, has been working with NHC to improve the regime's programs for sentenced juveniles, as well as advancing towards their treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Why are these types of reforms important?

They provide more opportunities for juveniles in education, rehabilitation and resocialization programs. They also provide opportunities to the staff who work with juveniles to improve professionally. Through continuous training, they are able to better recognize and assess the juveniles' needs and requirements. This reduces incidents, increases their safety, improves interactions and self-esteem among the convicts, and creates more opportunities for building a future after release. In addition, the reforms also provide better protection of human rights for sentenced persons.



Above: Nehat Thaçi, Director General of the Kosovo Correctional Service.

“Reforms reduce incidents, increases their safety, improves interactions and self-esteem among the convicts, and creates more opportunities for building a future after release.”

Nehat Thaçi



How do these reforms improve situations of detainee? Is there a particular story you'd like to highlight?

There have been cases where detainees have come to understand their mistakes and improve their behaviour or approach towards others. One particular story is of a convicted juvenile who has managed to start her university studies outside the institution.

Have you had a positive experience working with the NHC? What are the advantages of these types international collaboration projects?

Collaboration with NHC and similar international projects has many advantages. This makes prison life and activities more dynamic; provides opportunities for contacts and networking; fosters curiosity to pursue standards in line with systems from countries that pursue successful reintegration, through recognition of their values and experiences; enables us to build our capacities and align with these standards through training, research and study visits.

With the NHC we developed the EQUIP program, which continues to be implemented in juvenile labour practice in Lipjan correctional centres. Also, the study visit of Lipjan correctional centre staff to various prisons in the Netherlands in 2014 was a great opportunity to see the implementation of the EQUIP Program in juvenile institutions there.

Why is prison reform important? What do better prisons contribute to society as whole?

Prison reform can have multiple beneficiaries: society and community, family, the juvenile detainee and responsible authorities. These reforms can help increase confidence in public institutions and combat criminality by implementing rehabilitation programs based on individual needs and demands. Also by making prisons more humane through softer sanctions. As a result, it reduces the number that re-offend and return to correctional centres, and gives juveniles in detention the opportunity to build a future by being valuable members of society.

Left: Youths in Kosovo playing basketball. Courtesy Mr. Ulster on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

2019 Programme Highlights and Activities

This year the Criminal Justice Programme worked on 9 projects throughout Europe, aimed at the development of probation, alternative sanctions, and prison reform. In the probation projects, for the first time, a practice developed in one country was shared and implemented in another country, directly connecting two projects. With the help of the NHC, the probation service in Montenegro developed a formula to determine a reasonable caseload for probation officers. Dealing with similar issues, this formula was later shared with the probation service in Ukraine. This allowed Montenegro to contribute to the development of Ukraine's young probation system. A significant leap was also made in communications trainings in Ukraine by facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges between probation communications professionals from Latvia and Ukraine.

Prison reform projects continued in the western Balkans; they focused on improving the possibilities for juvenile detainees to successfully re-enter society. We partnered with prison staff, civil society organisations, and schools, to introduce programmes with these aims. One programme developed by NHC's partner Young in Prison, uses arts and sports to build relationships with juveniles, and through mentoring and support, strives to build their confidence and gain key life skills.

We also supported improvements to the Albanian penitentiary system by providing a personal advisor to the Minister of Justice engaged in pursuing reform and contributed to the professionalizing and further standardization of practices amongst European Prison Training Academies.

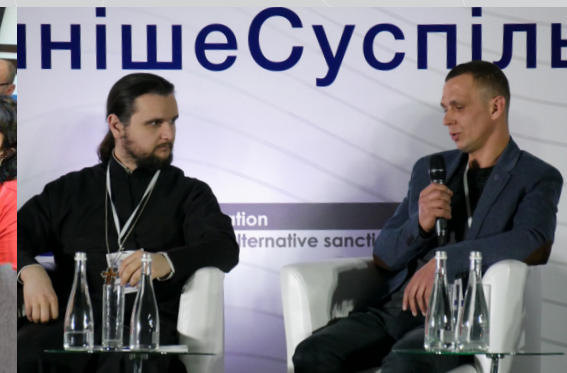
Below left: Prison reform partners and MC Kresha visiting Lipjan Correctional Centre.

Middle: Participants at EPTA Network Annual Conference in Slanic Moldova, Romania.

Below right: Probation volunteer Grygoriy Tonkyi discussing second chances at a public forum in Kyiv, Ukraine.

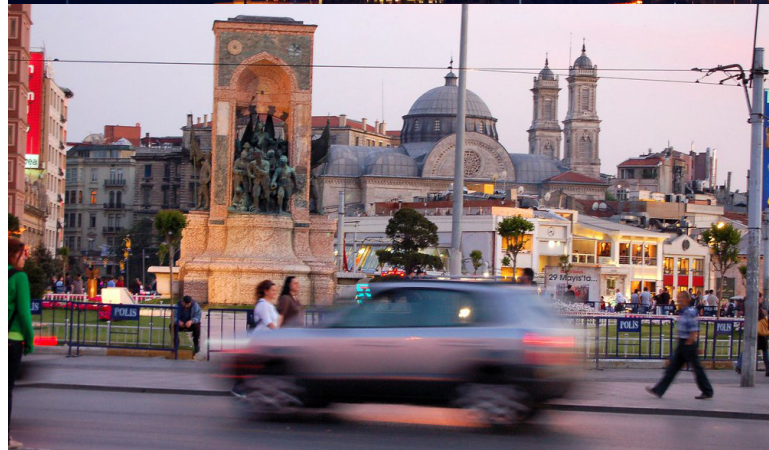


**This refers to meetings with different justice chain partners in the same meeting.*



Human Rights Defence Programme

We believe safeguarding human rights is the responsibility of all people because everyone benefits from having these rights. Those with the knowledge and courage to defend our rights should be encouraged to do so and supported in their endeavours. They should not be persecuted, tried, nor convicted for championing our fundamental freedoms. The Human Rights Defence Programme works towards broadly spreading the message that human rights are important for everyone in society. This is done in order to increase the public's support for human rights – and for those that defend them – so their work towards positive changes in society can continue and everyone can live in a more peaceful and just world.



Above: Euromaidan Revolution, Ukraine 2014. Courtesy Marco Fieber on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

Middle: Baku, Azerbaijan. Courtesy S.K. Lo on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

Below: Istanbul, Turkey. Courtesy Tonymz on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

Feature Interview

Breaking silos – Why we believe in mainstreaming human rights

The NHC supports and advocates mainstreaming human rights as a means to achieve our mission of universal compliance with international human rights agreements. In this interview, the NHC's Human Rights Defence Programme Manager, **Kirsten Meersschaert**, talks about the state of human rights today, describes what mainstreaming human rights is, and why it is necessary in achieving our mission.

Can you briefly tell me why human rights are important and what the NHC has done to safeguard these rights?

Human rights are a part of our daily lives, even if quite often we may not realize we are benefitting from them. Whether freely practicing your faith or openly expressing your own opinion, to gathering peacefully in support of a point of view, human rights protect us in virtually every aspect of our lives.

The NHC was founded on the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which recognized the need to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all peoples across the OSCE region. Such respect can only be guaranteed if human rights are consciously woven throughout all aspects of society. The NHC has thus prioritised the promotion of a human rights culture within societies – for example through raising

basic understanding of human rights through education and public communications, and advocating for all sectors – local and national authorities, businesses, the media, and the population at large – to ensure that human rights are respected.

What was the state of human rights in 2019?

The year marked one of the most significant in terms of communities around the world – France, Hong Kong, Sudan, and the Netherlands to name a few – gathering in great number to peacefully protest against a variety of injustices and often, in favour of human rights. This is an indication of the collective spirit of engagement many have towards making the world a better place.

However, in far too many instances these non-violent protests faced considerable crackdown from government authorities, both in democratic countries – UK and Spain – and authoritarian ones – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia, to name a few. These actions made the governments violators of two fundamental freedoms, which they themselves are legally obliged to protect: the freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression.



*Above: Kirsten Meersschaert,
NHC Human Rights Defence
Programme Manager.*

“Whether freely practicing your faith or openly expressing your own opinion, to gathering peacefully in support of a point of view, human rights protect us in virtually every aspect of our lives.”

Kirsten Meersschaert



Within the European Union, we have witnessed a deterioration of the human rights situation, in the form of the degradation of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland. Efforts by these governments to muzzle, politically control, or unjustifiably remove independent judges have raised fears about the future impartiality of the courts. In ignoring the potential impact on human rights in the design and implementation of their judicial reform measures, both Hungary and Poland risk infringing their populations' right to a fair trial –including the right to a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal. This is a clear breach of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and has led to unprecedented calls for suspending the two countries' voting rights under Article 7 of the TEU.

What is mainstreaming human rights?

Mainstreaming human rights is a process that can impact every level of society: national practices, individual actions, and international relations. It is a proactive step to ensure that due attention is given to upholding human rights by all actors.

At the national level, it helps make sure that all people, across all sectors –including economic, cultural, health, administrative, service, and technical industries –are aware of how their actions could impact human rights, and that they go about their work in such a way that human rights are maximally protected.

Individually, it means considering these fundamental rights in every facet of our lives. Human rights should be the frame through which all people engage in society. From the way we do business, to how we are educated, how we participate in civic life, or how we access opportunities and benefits. This is of crucial importance because when the rights of one are infringed, the rights of all are affected.

At the international level, governments should emphasize the importance of human rights in their relations with other countries. For example, a government could refer to the negative human rights situation in their trade negotiations with other countries, with the aim to use soft power to try and foster positive change in those countries.

*Above: European Court of Human Rights. Courtesy Hwj223 on Flickr.
[Link](#) | [CC License](#)*



Why does mainstreaming human rights matter?

Every country worldwide has recognized and agreed that all people have certain inalienable and inherent rights. Moreover, most countries have signed up to international treaties making them *legally obligated* to respect human rights. Yet universal human rights have not been achieved. We believe that mainstreaming human rights can help resolve this issue and contribute to a more peaceful and just world for all.

Significant progress has been made in *defining* what it means for individuals to have human rights, and in clearly *describing* how countries' human rights obligations are to be maintained. The issue now lies in getting those messages – the outcomes of decades of national, regional, and international advocacy about human rights – to *all other areas* of societal and international relations. Failure to do so would be somewhat comparable to a company engaged in “greenwashing,” in which *only* the company’s marketing department recognises the

importance of the global combat against climate change and tackles the issue by adding superficial “green labels” to their product – while the rest of the company’s approach is just business as usual. Just as this company would require changes in practice amongst *all* other departments – production, supply chain, and upper management – *all sectors* of national governments and *all areas* of international relations need to comprehend human rights commitments and know how to actively pursue them within the scope of their work.

Mainstreaming human rights also provides greater insurance against the arbitrary restriction of rights. If human rights are proactively and systematically incorporated into all aspects of our lives, then they cannot simply be turned on and off when convenient. Rights and fundamental freedoms must be guaranteed at all times, whether in times of peace or in times of crisis, and only a truly holistic – mainstreamed – approach can make this possible.

Above: Pepijn Gerrits, NHC Executive Director judging Kinder- en Jongerenrechtswinkel 2019 Children's Rights Debate in The Hague, Netherlands

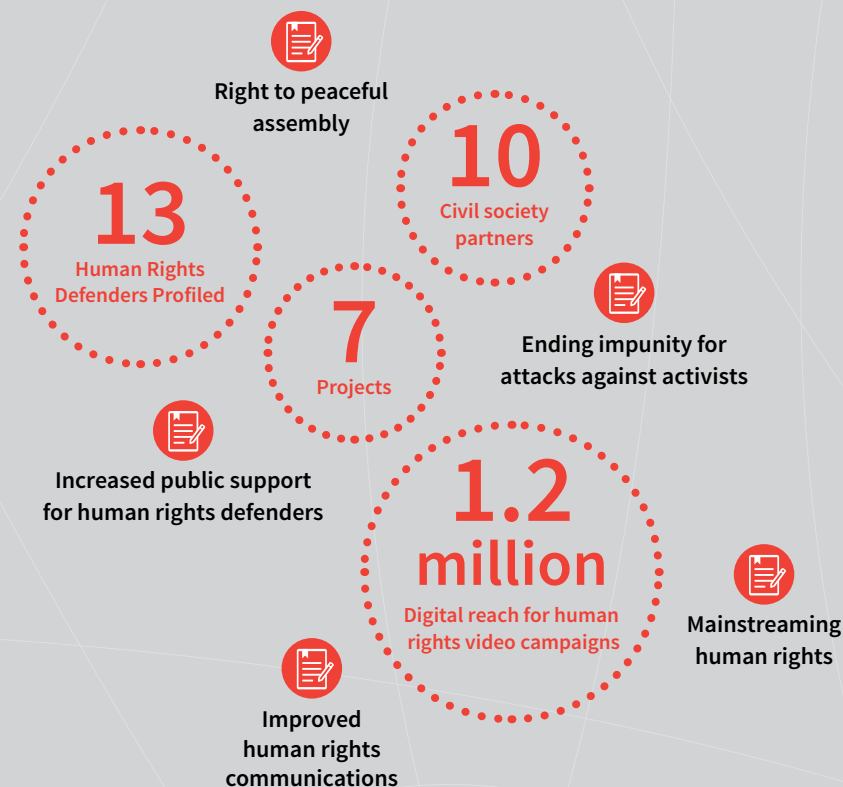
2019 Programme Highlights and Activities

This year the Human Rights Defence Programme continued its work in asserting a positive role for, and contributing to, the protection of human rights defenders. We worked together with partners on strengthening human rights communications practices, advocating for the mainstreaming of human rights, and providing ad hoc legal, psychological, and moral support to individual human rights defenders acutely at risk. In particular, we focused on countries where an increasing crackdown against civil society has been taking place, including Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine.

Human rights defenders from Turkey and Azerbaijan attended workshops and trainings aimed at providing them with the necessary skills to relay their messages to the general public. Topics covered included influencing with stories, connecting with audiences; language techniques for persuasion; developing organisational communication strategies; content strategy and social media marketing for non-profits. Throughout the year a variety of these skills were put to practice. In Azerbaijan, a high-quality campaign for the general public was carried out. The campaign, comprised of several [videos](#), challenges the perception of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan. It argues that human rights defenders are people who uphold the rights of *everyone* in society, rather than only the rights of small marginalised groups.

We also continued advocacy for mainstreaming human rights, in particular in bi-lateral relations. This was done through participation in international discussions on human rights, consultations with relevant government and international organisation representatives, and public solidarity campaigns for at risk human rights defenders.

Below left: Human rights defenders from Azerbaijan speaking about the situation in their country at a lunch discussion in The Hague, Netherlands. **Middle:** Nejat Taştan, Dilip Chakma, Thalia Malmberg speaking at [The Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Human Rights panel discussion](#) in The Hague, Netherlands. **Below right:** Ania Sharwood, NHC Senior Communications Expert, giving a communications training for human rights defenders in Istanbul, Turkey.



Integrity and Accountability Programme

We believe integrity and accountability are the natural enemies of corruption and nepotism and essential in upholding the rule of law and maintaining a healthy democracy. The rule of law can only function when the judiciary is truly independent, when law enforcement honours the law, when public servants live up to their role to serve and in the community's interests, and when civil society and the media play the critical role of objective observer. The Integrity and Accountability Programme contributes to a change in mentality and mind-set amongst all sectors of the government towards more proactive support for the rule of law. This will be achieved through increased dialogue and collaboration between the different sectors of government, civil society, and the media, and ensuring all relevant actors have a minimum level of understanding and appreciation for key aspects of the rule of law.



Above: Het Nutshuis, setting for several Rule of Law Training Programme sessions, in The Hague, Netherlands.

Photo © www.nutshuis.nl

Middle: The view from Jvari Monastery, near Tbilisi, Georgia.

Below: Skanderbeg Square in Tirana, Albania, the location of the 2019 Matra Rule of Law Training Programme Alumni Days. Courtesy Andrew Milligan Sumo on Flickr. [Link](#) | CC License

Feature Interview

Why is rule of law important? – An Armenian Perspective

Since the 2018 “Velvet Revolution” many perceive Armenia as on a path towards sustained democracy and an increased respect for the rule of law. In 2019, Armenia was added to the list of countries participating in the Matra Rule of Law Training Programme. Hayk Hovhannisyan is a member of Armenia’s Supreme Judicial Council, a recently founded independent body that seeks to guarantee independence of the judiciary and judges. One of the first Training Programme participants from Armenia, he participated in the 2019 Administration of Justice training. In this interview, Hovhannisyan describes the importance of the rule of law in the reforms taking place in Armenia and the value of peer-to-peer exchanges and transnational knowledge sharing.

In your opinion, what makes now the right time for Armenia to join such transnational capacity building projects as the Matra Rule of Law Training Programme?

The commitment of the current political power in Armenia to democratic values and supporting the development of a truly independent judiciary creates unique momentum. These new initiatives are welcomed and encouraged by all three branches of state power. The Netherlands offers a wealth of experience in building democratic state institutions as a precondition for growth, independent development, and leadership among

other members of the European family of nations. Therefore, the knowledge and skills obtained in such projects may indeed be applied in one’s own efforts to lead well-informed positive changes upon returning home.

Does this reform movement reflect a desire on behalf of the Armenian people to see the rule of law respected in their country?

The reform is inspired and driven by the national desire to live in a rule of law state. It is not a secret that many of our compatriots emigrated from Armenia mainly because of the low level of human rights protection and inability to live a life with dignity. Therefore, it is twice obliging and we do our best to meet the natural and legitimate expectations of the Armenian people.

What do you feel other countries can learn from Armenia and the way in which it is approaching justice sector reform and the rule of law?

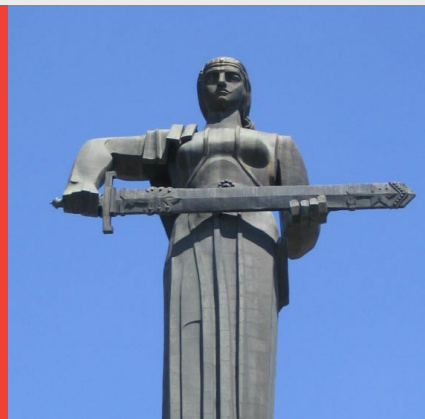
Despite being an ancient nation, we are flexible, open-minded and dare to experiment. We have the courage to initiate and do things. Sometimes we may fail, but we are optimistic and correct our mistakes and move forward. We use the talent and



*Above: Hayk Hovhannisyan,
Member of the Armenian
Supreme Judicial Council.*

“We all belong to the big European family. Sharing transnational knowledge means getting to know each other and better appreciate our challenges, values and dreams.”

Hayk Hovhannisyan



experience of the worldwide Armenian diaspora in addition to foreign counterparts. We do not hide problems from society, we encourage self-criticism and accept constructive criticism.

During your time with Matra Rule of Law Training, you worked alongside counterparts from ten other countries. What opportunities do such peer-to-peer exchanges provide?

These cultural and professional exchanges among delegates provide a unique opportunity to broaden the world outlook or “sharpen the saw” exchanges are enriched with international experience and knowledge. It becomes obvious that, in general, we face many common challenges and it gives hope that you are not alone on the planet facing these problems. Positive experiences of foreign colleagues is inspiring and gives food for thought, while negative experiences also have educational value. It can help in avoiding the same mistakes and in fine-tuning your own strategy of approaching and solving problems. It is very useful to learn how other counterparts approached and solved problems you are facing in your country as well. One examples was learning the pros and

cons of a “vetting process,” which Ukraine and Albania are experiencing now. One can read books and scientific articles, that is no doubt important, about “transitional justice” or judiciary reform, but nothing can substitute live discussions with fellow judges who are actually experiencing “the vetting process” themselves.

We all belong to the big European family. Transnational knowledge sharing means getting to know each other and better appreciate our challenges, values and dreams. The knowledge obtained often can be localized and applied. Southern and Eastern European countries have relatively recently gone through or are in the process of transitioning to consolidated democracy. Their experience is highly valuable and important for us as there are common traps one can avoid if equipped with knowledge and experience of neighbours. Adding to the thorough and superb guidance and advice of the hosting party, shared by scientists and practitioners invited by the Matra Rule of Law Training Programme one could experience *nanos gigantum humeris insidentes* [standing on the shoulder of giants] in action. [Read the interview in full here](#)

Left: The Velvet revolution of 2018 outside the Government Building, Yerevan, Armenia. Courtesy Anthony Surace on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

Middle: Mother Armenia, Peace Monument. Yerevan, Armenia. Courtesy Salymfayad on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

Right: Yerevan Cascade cultural centre, Yerevan, Armenia. Courtesy Alex Malev on Flickr. [Link](#) | [CC License](#)

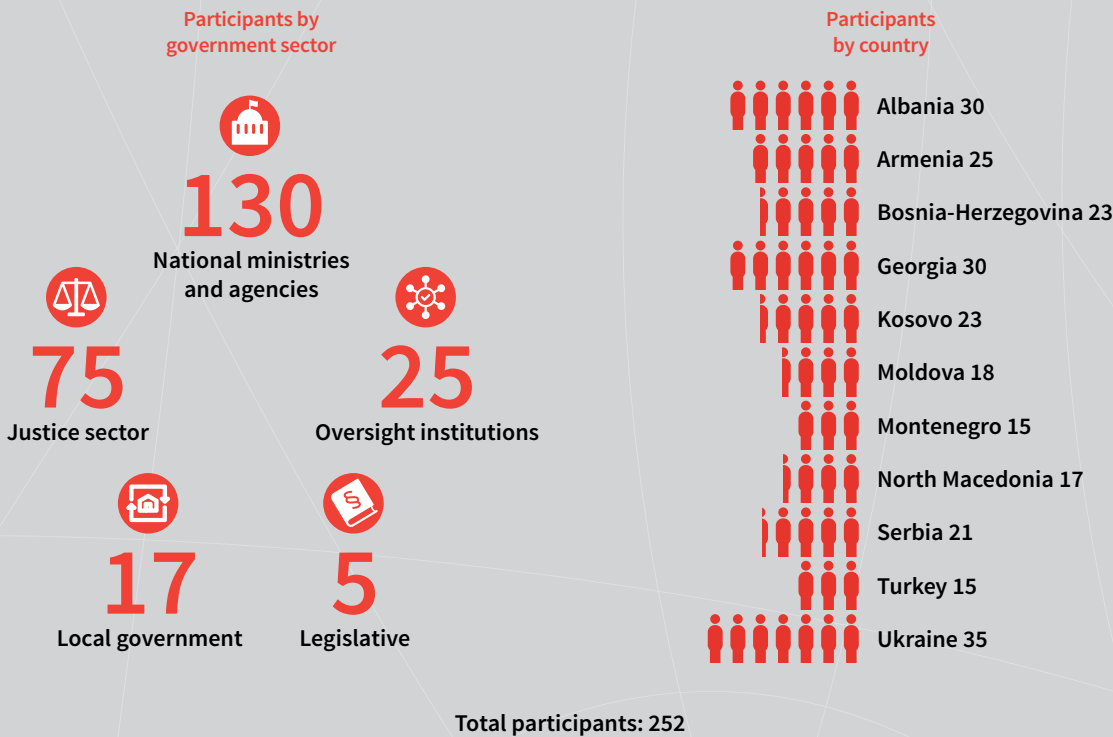
2019 Programme Highlights

This year, the NHC completed the third year of the **Matra Rule of Law Training Programme (ROLT)**, in close cooperation with **Leiden Law School** and **The Hague Academy for Local Governance**. The trainings introduced policy advisors, members of the judiciary and other public servants working in the government and justice sectors to best practices in a wide range of rule of law themes. We not only coordinated the programme and its alumni activities, we also designed and implemented the trainings on **Human Rights and Minorities** and on **Detention and Alternative Sanctions**, two rule of law areas in which the NHC holds particular expertise. Through these trainings, we offered 252 public servants a wide and active network as well as practical tools and strategies to lead and apply reform in their respective countries.

We also contributed to the **Virtual Insanity** project, led by the **European Partnership for Democracy**. The project contributed to the development of effective EU level policy aimed at guaranteeing transparency in digital political advertising. This was done through research and discussions amongst all relevant stakeholders, from public institutions, academia, and civil society, at both the national and European level.

Below left: Erinda Ballanca, Albania’s People’s Advocate speaking about the rule of law and human rights at the 2019 Rule of Law Training Programme Alumni Day in Tirana, Albania. *Below right:* Participants of the Detention and Alternative Sanctions training during a reception at the Nutshuis in The Hague, Netherlands.

Matra Rule of Law Training Programme Participant Information



Security and Human Rights Monitor

The Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHR Monitor) is the NHC's oldest running activity. It has come a long way in its nearly 30 years of history. From the beginning, the Helsinki Monitor has been covering developments leading up to the establishment of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and in the decades since, maintaining consistent analysis of issues surrounding the OSCE. A lot has changed in the world since 1990, and the Helsinki Monitor has changed with it, growing and evolving into the multifaceted platform Security and Human Rights Monitor.

Today, the Security and Human Rights Monitor incorporates several aspects including: news articles, analysis and opinion pieces, interviews, and peer-reviewed academic articles that all together continue to provide quality analysis on the work of the OSCE, as well as on security and human rights challenges stemming from the OSCE region and beyond. It remains the foremost and only independent platform covering the OSCE.



Above: Flags of the OSCE participating States. Photo: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev.

2019 Interviews



"I observe a banalization and generalization of violence against the press"

Harlem Désir

OSCE Representative on
Freedom of the Media

Photo: OSCE/Liubomir Turcanu

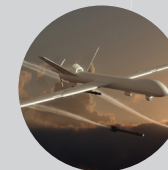


"Russia should honour its commitments"

Christopher Robinson

Dept. Asst. Secretary, European
and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. State Dept.

Photo: USOSCE/Mahvish Khan



"We are facing an increasing danger of a potential arms race"

Ulrike Franke

Policy Fellow European
Council on Foreign Relations

Photo: istockphoto/Koto_feja



"OSCE currently not able to exploit its full potential"

Miroslav Lajčák

OSCE Chairperson-in-Office
and Slovak Foreign Minister

Photo: MgrArt. Tomas Bokor/MFEASR



"We helped to contain the expansion of the armed conflict"

Amb. Ertuğrul Apakan

Former Chief Monitor, OSCE Special
Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell



"The magic word is trust"

Pascale Baeriswyl

Swiss Deputy Foreign Minister
and State Secretary

Photo: Stephanie Liechtenstein



"We do all we can to make this stick"

Mark Etherington

Deputy Chief Monitor, OSCE Special
Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Photo: OSCE/Evgeniy Malolteka



"We managed to find a solution just in time"

Lukáš Parížek

Slovak State Secretary and Special
Rep. for the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell



"The essence of the spirit of dialogue is to involve everybody"

Amb. Alessandro Azzoni

2018 Chairperson of the OSCE
Permanent Council

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell

Below: The Hague Conversations on Conflict, October 2019: speakers and attendees.



Building bridges: NHC Networking and Advocacy

We believe no one can achieve things alone, that is why we see the power of building bridges and speaking with a united voice. The NHC continues to maintain a strong presence in the networks in which we participate. Through our networks, both formal and informal, we coordinate with peer organisations, jointly undertake advocacy towards governments, Parliaments and other stakeholders. **Our mission is to build and secure justice and compliance with international human rights agreements.**

The following three statements underpin our viewpoint as to how this can be achieved, with highlights of our networking and advocacy activities in 2019 and how they have contributed to our mission.

1. We believe civil society, governments, and international institutions need to cooperate in improving the human rights situation across Europe.

In 2019, we took on the Secretariat of the Civic Solidarity Platform. The Platform brought a range of civil society representatives to the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM). The Platform also held the Parallel Civil Society Conference at the time of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting (Parallel Conference). At HDIM, we argued for the need to improve communication strategies in order to gain public support for the defence of human rights. The Parallel Conference informed governments about the situation of freedom of assembly across the region and recommended ways forward in strengthening this fundamental right.

Above: Panellists discussing the importance of human rights communications, from left to right: Katarzyna Batko, David Mark, Harry Hummel, Antanina Maslyka.



VOTE YES

ON 12 SEPTEMBER FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ACTION ON HUNGARY

2. We believe in the rule of law and that governments should not control the judiciary.

We got together with civil society organisations from across the European Union to stop the backsliding of the rule of law. We called for the advancement of Article 7 proceedings against Poland and Hungary, which aim to protect and restore the independence of the judiciary. In order to prevent the further degradation of the rule of law throughout the EU, we highlighted the need of national parliaments to coordinate and push the Article 7 issue further at the EU level. We informed the parliaments of Member States on the situation of rule of law in those countries and developed strategies to cooperate on strengthening the media, fundamental rights, and the rule of law.

3. We believe the fundamental rights of all people in society should be respected, including of those who are imprisoned.

In order to contribute to this vision, we continued efforts to further professionalize the European Penitentiary Training Academies (EPTA) network, within the framework of the EPTA project. New EPTA members joined, a professional online platform and website for the exchange of knowledge was developed, and experts from all over Europe gathered to share good practices. Topics included how to better understand and assess detainees, including the risks they may pose to others, ensuring safety and security in prisons, contributing to rehabilitation and preparation for release, and prison management and leadership.

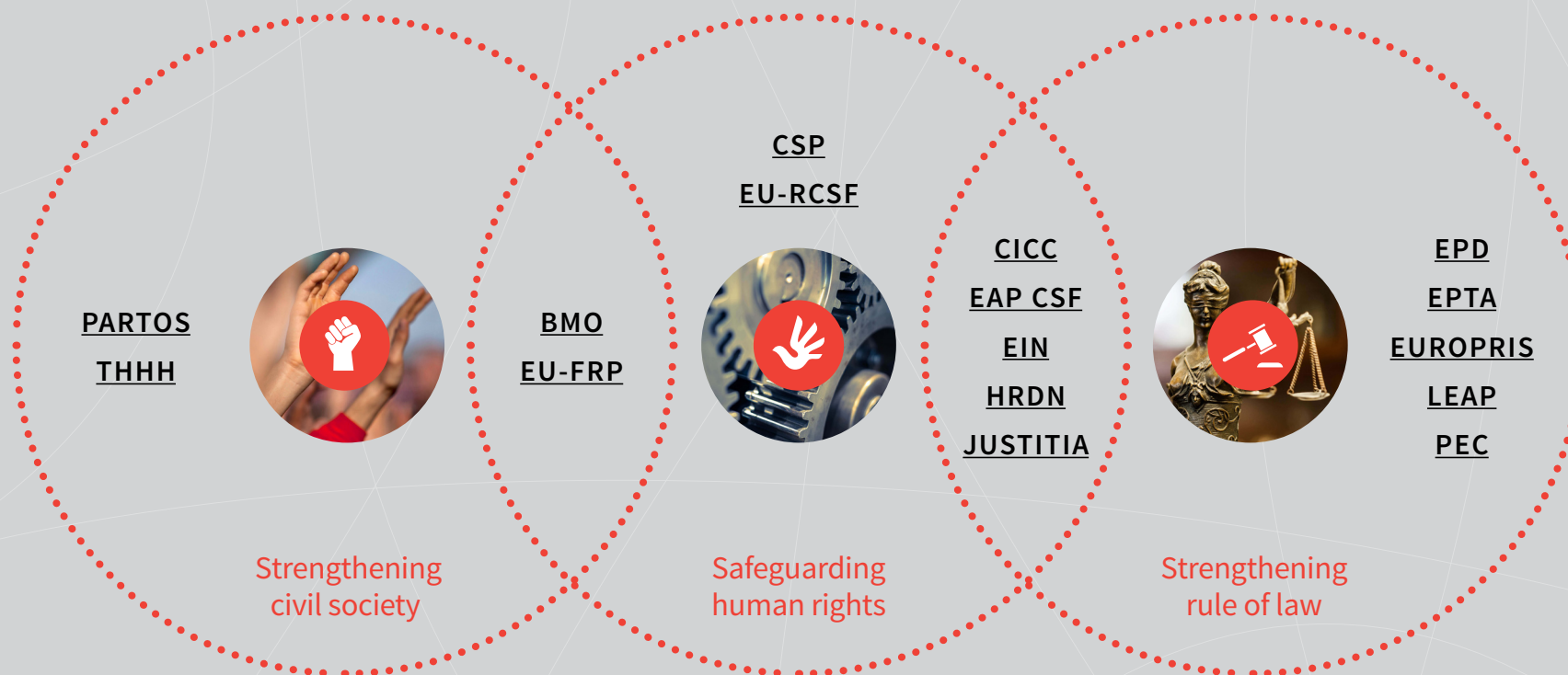


Left: Vote Yes Art. 7/A Mega Campaign image on Article 7 measures against Poland and Hungary.

Right: Participants at an EPTA meeting at the NHC's office in The Hague.

Our network

NHC participates in 16 networks operating within our core competencies: strengthening rule of law; safe-guarding human rights; and strengthening civil society.



Key to acronyms

BMO	Netherlands Human Rights NGO Platform
CICC	Coalition for the International Criminal Court
CSP	Civic Solidarity Platform
EAP CSF	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EIN	European Implementation Network
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EPTA	European Prison Training Academies Network
EU-FRP	EU Fundamental Rights Platform

EU-RCSF	EU-Russia Civil Society Forum
EUROPRIS	European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services
HRDN	Human Rights and Democracy Network
JUSTITIA	JUSTITIA Network
LEAP	Legal Experts Advisory Panel
PARTOS	Dutch Network for International Development
PEC	Prison Education Consortium
THHH	The Hague Humanity Hub

NHC Governance



Supervisory Board

Responsible for supervising the Board; advising on medium and long-term policies and strategies; and approving policy and strategy plans, reports and the annual state of accounts prepared by the Board.

Piet de Klerk (Chairman)

Angela Kaptein (Vice-chair)

Marjolijn van Oordt (Communication and Public Affairs)

Anne Maljers (NGO Management)

Eric Rijnders (Fundraising)

Board

Responsible for representing, managing and governing the foundation; developing, implementing and reporting on its annual and multiannual plans and report on financial management; preparing the annual state of accounts; and ensuring its sustainability.

Pepijn Gerrits

Committee Members

Responsible for advising both the Board and Supervisory Board on its mission and strategy, relating to trends in the fields of work covered by the foundation. Members of the Committee are appointed by the Supervisory Board

Aminata Cairo

Brianne McGonigle Leyh

Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen

Jaap de Zwaan

Kathleen Ferrier

Kitty Nooy

Lodewijk (Lo) Casteleijn

Maria Anne van Dijk

Marijke van Veen

Marit Maij

Max Bader

Quirine Eijkman

Rick Lawson

Sjef van Gennip

Takvor Avedissian

Above: NHC Supervisory Board, Board, and Committee Members. Photo by Allard Willemse Photography.

NHC Funding Partners



Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs



National Postcode Lottery



European Union



European Partnership for Democracy



U.S. Mission to the OSCE



Austrian Delegation to the OSCE



Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein to the OSCE and to the UN



OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities



British Embassy in Tirana

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