

Netherlands Helsinki Committee Annual Report 2020
Civil society challenged by global pandemic



Access to Justice



Integrity & Accountability

Human Rights Defence



Criminal Justice Reform



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Civil society challenged by global pandemic

2020 was an extraordinary year. The impact of the pandemic on the whole of civil society in the OSCE, as well as on the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, cannot be underestimated. In this year's Annual Report, we give you an overview of our work in this historic year, through the eyes of our partners, and through our own reflections. You will learn more about the activities of 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, and which stand as a beacon of resilience in the face of the unprecedented challenges last year presented.

At the very onset of the pandemic, we found ourselves in the middle of two MaTra Rule of Law trainings. With airports and borders closing all around us, we had to act quickly to repatriate 65 training participants. The Rule of Law training, as well as many other of our projects, had to be temporarily put on hold. However, despite initial delays and with immense dedication from the whole team, we were soon able to switch over to virtually conducting our trainings and activities. The first online Rule of Law training was launched in September 2020, and received great reviews from participants – you can find out more from our interview with one of the first RoLT online alumna Natasha Metodijeva.

Continuing on with matters relating to Rule of Law, as well as capacity building and Human Rights, in 2020 the NHC joined

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

Right: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (pictured fifth from the right), leader of the Belarusian democratic movement, met with representatives of Dutch civil society organisations in November 2020.





an exclusive partnership agreement with the European Commission and 6 other European organisations, with the aim to strengthen civil society in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. This partnership allows for quicker access to European funding in the 6 EaP countries; granting quick and efficient help in times of need. As a member of this coalition, and with the help of EU funding, NHC seeks to ensure continued and enhanced monitoring and advisory work of civil society organizations in the Eastern Partnership countries on Covid-19 measures in closed institutions. For these purposes, the NHC provides sub-grants to CSOs to monitor implementation of Covid-19 measures in and provide equipment (PPE and IT) for closed institutions. This is just one of the ways in which the NHC is contributing to humane detention with a view towards rehabilitation and re-entry into society.

Finally, in 2020 we have continued to provide a platform to both organisations and individuals standing up for democracy and human rights in authoritarian societies, and seeking support in the Netherlands, or the EU. At the end of

November, we organised and facilitated meetings between Dutch parliamentarians, NGO and trade unions, and the leader of the Democratic opposition of Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, on our premises. The outcomes of these and similar meetings are integrated into meetings held with the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe, in our role as the secretariat of the Civic Solidarity Platform.

I hope to have given you a short impression of all the activities conducted in this unprecedented year, in which – despite numerous challenges – we continued with activities and projects that give meaning to our motto: *Building and securing justice across Europe*.

Pepijn Gerrits

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

Left: Joint logo for EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme for Eastern partnership project.

Centre: Pepijn Gerrits, Executive Director NHC during a video shoot for a MaTra ROLT online training.

Right: 'Defending Human Rights in Turkey: Stories that Need to be Heard' online exhibition launch event.

NHC at a Glance

Programmes by Country/Region 2016 – 2020

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

Total Activities per Programme 2020

Criminal Justice Reform

48

6 Prison Reform Trainings
7 Probation Trainings
35 Online Trainings

Access to Justice

16

3 Trainings
13 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Human Rights Defence

24

6 Trainings
18 Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Integrity and Accountability

58+

5 ROLT Trainings
3 Online Webinars
50+ One-on-One Exchanges / Lobby Activities



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 among 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 the rule of law, safe-guarding human rights, and building the capacity of 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 back then of civil society in the Helsinki process and beyond, today allows actors to hold governments accountable for implementing the Helsinki principles of upholding the **rule of law** and **human rights**.

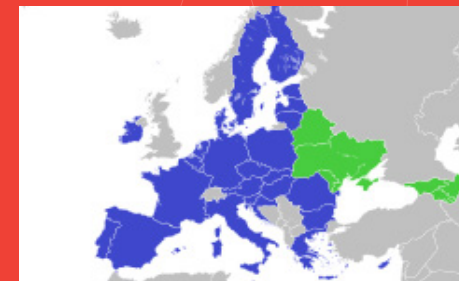
NHC Programmes: Feature Interviews and Highlights



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Human Rights Defence

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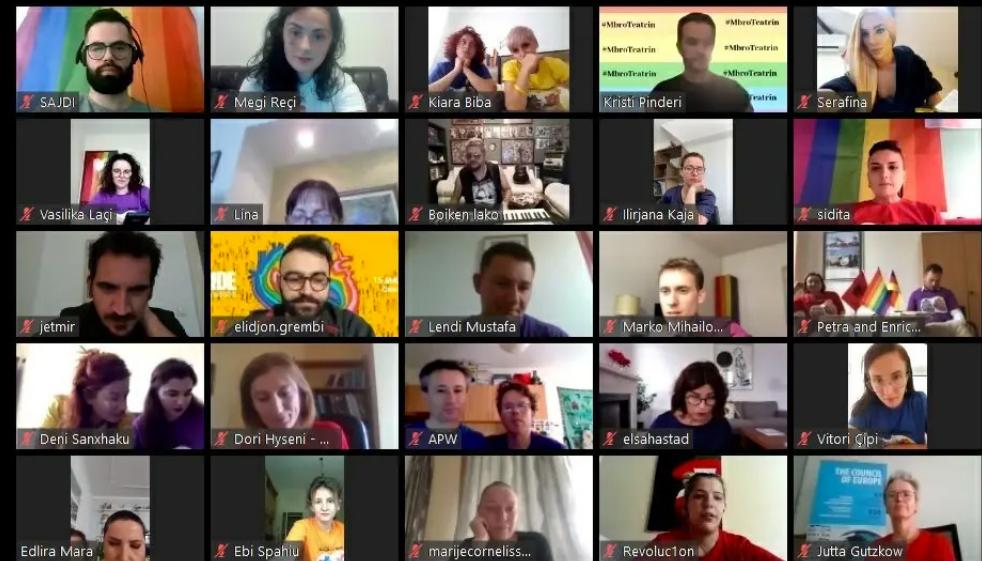
Integrity and Accountability

Reflections from MaTra ROLT Alumna Natasha Metodijeva on the Online Training

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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: Albania held its first online Pride Parade in May 2020. Courtesy www.historia-ime.com

Left: Stari most, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photo by Anton Sharov on [Unsplash](https://www.unsplash.com).

Feature Interview

Human Trafficking and Victim Protection in Times of Covid-19

Balkans Act Now! is part of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee's Access to Justice programme. Access to Justice works for a criminal justice process in which the rights of vulnerable groups are protected. It strengthens capacities of actors in the justice chain, as well as of civil society organisations that assist these groups. By focusing on networking and coalition building, the programme brings together actors that normally do not cooperate.

The ultimate goal of the BAN III project is to ensure the protection of human trafficking victims. To achieve this, BAN III provides mechanisms for regular monitoring of the rights of victims throughout the criminal justice process. It increases victims' participation in policy development, and it ensures that civil society organisations (CSOs) have the right skills, knowledge and capacity to ensure that the victim's needs, rights and entitlements are met. The project works with civil society sectors in Serbia (ASTRA-Anti trafficking action), Macedonia (Open Gate La Strada), Albania (Center for Legal Civic Initiatives), Montenegro (Women's Rights Centre) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (International Forum of Solidarity –Emmaus). Here, it aims to promote systematic monitoring of anti-trafficking policies by establishing a national rapporteur mechanism.

The NHC has worked closely with ASTRA Anti-trafficking Action as part of our Balkans Act Now! project for many years. We spoke to Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić, Head of Operations at ASTRA Anti Trafficking Action about our cooperation on the BAN III project in these unprecedented times.

The BAN project is in its third phase now. What makes this phase particularly important, and what changes do you hope to see happen by the end of this phase?

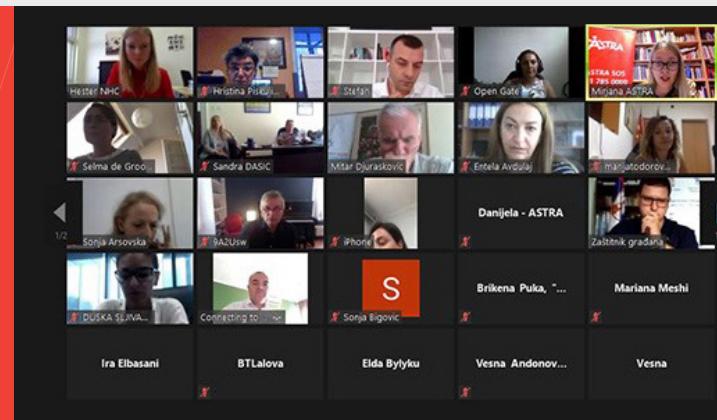
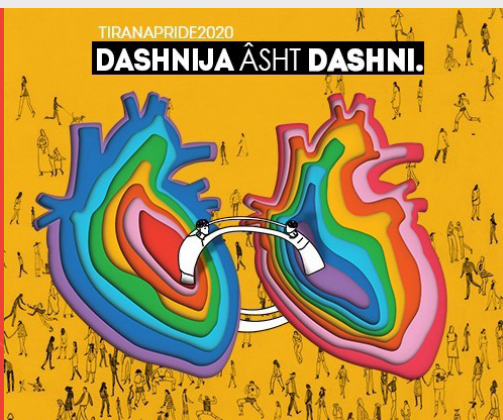
Trafficking in human beings is not a local/national phenomenon. Western Balkan countries in the middle of EU accession processes, focusing on requirements relating to tackling organised crime, are dealing with common challenges, and close cooperation amongst regional stakeholders is needed. Our hope is for closer cooperation in this phase of the project to result in improved victim cross border identification and support, and a start to adopting legislation and displaying a strong track record of implementation. The ultimate goal is to make sure that anti-trafficking policies in no way do harm either to victims of trafficking or to other social groups that are in a broad sense considered to be at risk of falling victim to trafficking, all in the pursuit of some alleged higher purpose.



Above: Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić, Head of operations at Astra-anti-trafficking action, BAN III Network partner.

“Programs for assisting victims, including psychological and legal assistance predominately depend on CSOs’ resources. Without CSOs’ support, victims would be returned to the same circumstances that led them to trafficking, invisible and discriminated because of what happened to them.”

Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić



This last year has been challenging for civil society organisations around the globe. How would you say your organisation, and partner organizations from this projects were affected in particular?

Despite the efforts invested, all BAN countries from the Western Balkans region are still facing numerous gaps in the institutional response to the trafficking in human beings, as the most severe form of human rights violation and gender-based violence. The weakest points in institutional protection are lack of specialised victim support and services, quality indicators of support and coordination among all relevant actors, including lacking expertise and sensitivity in recognising trafficking and dealing with female victims of trafficking, and their gender specific longer recovery. After the official declaration of Covid-19 as a pandemic, in March 2020, many BAN countries were faced with a state of emergency. Consequently, all above mentioned constraints of the institutional social services system, became even more exacerbated. The economic and social impact of the crisis led to higher demand for social services. For instance, since the beginning of the Covid-19

crisis in Serbia, the number of calls to ASTRA's Victim Support Unit SOS hotline, increased by 100% compared with 2019, while the number of field interventions increased by 163%. Covid-19 is adding a new burden on the victims of trafficking and those at risk, with its economic consequences and increase of domestic violence, moving restrictions, etc. Programs for assisting victims, including psychological and legal assistance predominately depend on CSOs' resources. Without CSO's support, victims would be returned to the same circumstances that led them to trafficking, invisible and discriminated because of what happened to them.

What was the biggest obstacle to overcome in the past year?

BAN is a regional project that involves many actors from relevant institutions who need to meet often and work together and, through direct contact, improve their relations that can strengthen future cross-border cooperation. The lack of face-to-face contact due to impossibility of travelling in the previous year as well as lack of digital capacities, made it more challenging.

Left: Digital flyer for Tirana Virtual Pride. Courtesy www.exit.al.

Right: BAN III Zoom – Online study visit to the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings in the Netherlands.



On a personal level, I think it is important to emphasize that we dealt with something that many human rights CSOs globally dealt with – almost internalised preasure that even in these “abnormal” circumstances we need to keep the same (or even higher) level of efficiency.

What achievement would you say you are most proud of from this project?

The Unique Monitoring Tool database that is developed to facilitate the usage of the indicators for monitoring and evaluation of anti-trafficking policies, in order to provide anti-trafficking practitioners with a monitoring and evaluation framework which will allow them to gather evidence and analyse the quality of the laws, procedures and practices related to combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims. The greatest value is that the indicators and tool itself are developed by professionals who have been working on the problem of human trafficking for almost 20 years, governmental representatives and CSOs together. It is important because in the future we will all use and report based on this mechanism.

ASTRA has been a strong advocate for the introduction of the role of a National Rapporteur for Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans. Can you tell you a bit about the success of this campaign, and how it developed also during the pandemic.

BAN envisages the establishment and effective functioning of National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism – independent institution whose prime responsibility is monitoring of implementation of anti-trafficking policies. Based on our common advocacy efforts, a National Rapporteur in Macedonia has been established and is operational within the Ombudsman office.

In Serbia, there are positive signals that a similar change is also on the way. The Ombudsman of Serbia announced that the National Rapporteur mechanism needs to be recognized in its organisational structure. However, this needs to happen through a change of law, which is more difficult and might prolong implementation, but it is a positive signal that change is on the way.

Above: Sidita Zaja, Executive Director of the NGO PROLGBT in Albania spoke during the Night of Dictatorship in September on ‘Covid-19 and its effect on LGBTI+ communities’.

2020 Programme Highlights

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. While some activities had to be shifted to online formats, in cooperation with our partners we worked on ensuring the rights of LGBTI community are respected, as support and community has been more vulnerable due to pandemic. We also supported the set up of awareness raising campaigns.

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 citizens can influence policies on human trafficking and helped ensure civil society would play a bigger role in the treatment of those subject to human trafficking. We facilitated a knowledge exchange between the Dutch National Rapporteur and similar institutions in the Western Balkans.

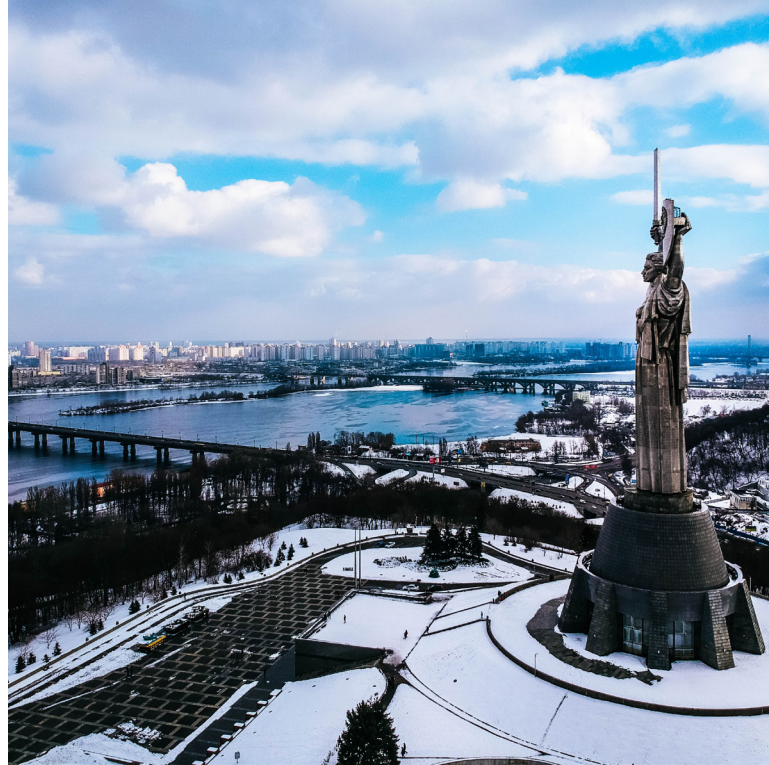
Through setting up the Legal Expertise and Advisory Board (LEAP) network in Kosovo, we promoted procedural rights, ensuring individuals are treated fairly and equally by the courts when undergoing trial. Coordinated by our partner Fair Trials, LEAP in Kosovo facilitated exchanges between network members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

Left: Covid-19 and its impact on LGBTI+ communities online event in September 2020, featuring Sidita Zaja from PROLGBT Albania. **Right:** Online study visit to the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings in the Netherlands.



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, prison, and civil society organisations to ensure reforms pursued are effectively implemented throughout the entire system.



*Above: Prishtina, Kosovo.
Courtesy W.J. Gauthier on Flickr.
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*Left: Kyiv Skyline. Courtesy Denys
Rodionenko on Unsplash.*

Feature Interview

Shifting Focus During the Pandemic in the Serbia/Montenegro Probation Project

On the project: Strengthening the Probation and the System of Alternative Sanctions in Montenegro and Serbia

Serbia and Montenegro are both candidates for accession to the EU. One of the conditions to become an EU Member State (as defined by the Copenhagen criteria) is that a country can demonstrate that it complies with all the EU's standards and rules, including rules related to prison and probation.

In order to develop probation systems in these two countries, the NHC and its partners assist in strengthening the capacities of the relevant actors within the judicial chain, which work on probation and alternative sanctions. The work of the project partners is inspired by the European Probation Rules, which stipulate that effective probation work consists of activities such as risk assessment of offenders, advice to prosecutors and judges, supervision, guidance and control of offenders in the community, and implementation of alternative sanctions, including community service sentences.

Leo Tigges is a Senior Expert with the NHC and an independent Community Based Justice Advisor, currently involved in various international projects that aim to enable

the establishment or improvement of probation systems and probation organisations.

Leo, one of the main objectives of this project is to organise “short-term missions to guide, coach and train their Serbian and Montenegrin peers, including those working with local civil society organisations (CSOs)” and host “regular meetings and seminars between probation officers, the Ministry of Justice, judges and prosecutors”. How did you and the NHC adapt to the new circumstances under Covid-19 where travel and face-to-face organisation of such gatherings was no longer possible?

Once we realised the gravity and reality of the new situation, we began to consider other ways in which we can add value to the project and the advancement of the development of viable probation systems in Serbia and Montenegro. A few years ago, I was involved in a project with CEP (the Confederation for European Probation), where we developed case management system maps, as schematic overviews of the case management in probation in almost every jurisdiction in Europe. The system maps offer graphic representations of both the work processes (probation



Above: Leo Tigges, senior expert with the NHC and independent community based justice advisor.

“The development process of the systems maps was a great binding agent to keep in close contact with everyone in the project. We needed each other, needed to gather information from local consultants and partners, to have them verify drafts along the way, and we were able to show them that even in these unprecedented times we can keep developing useful concepts and relationships with the aim to further the development of the probation systems in Serbia and Montenegro.”

Leo Tigges



system work activities) and mapping the relationship between the probation organisation and wider society. We decided to focus in the last few months of developing such maps for Serbia and Montenegro and I am pleased to report the systems maps for both countries are well on their way.

Once the decision was made to make this shift in focus, what can you tell us about the process of developing the system maps?

The development process of the systems maps was a great binding agent to keep in close contact with everyone in the project. We needed each other, needed to gather information from local consultants and partners, to have them verify drafts along the way, and we were able to show them that even in these unprecedented times we can keep developing useful concepts and relationships with the aim to further the development of the probation systems in Serbia and Montenegro. When the system maps are compared to the European Probation Rules, gaps in the systems can be

identified. Therefore system maps can easily turned in to road maps for future activities; for how probation systems could and can develop there in the coming years.

We hope to give Montenegro and Serbia the tools and handle they need to bring their probation system further along.

But of course, physical contact cannot be replaced, and I am sure the process would have been quicker in real life. We made due with the cards we were dealt and are very proud of the results accomplished. At the end of the day, the focus shift may not have happened was it not for the push of the pandemic.

Above: Example of Probation System Map, courtesy of <https://www.cep-probation.org>.

Above: Example of Probation System Map, courtesy of <https://www.cep-probation.org>.

Feature Interview

Reflections on the EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme for Eastern Partnership

As part of the EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme for Eastern Partnership, the NHC joined forces with People in Need (PIN), and AFEW International (AFEW) to propose a set of activities in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and contribute towards longer term socio-economic resilience of vulnerable groups. The action will support key actors in the target countries to achieve the goals of the action via a set of interrelated activities that both aim to address the short to medium-term needs and longer-term institutional barriers of implementation of international standards on Covid-19.

Anton van Kalmthout, Senior Expert for the NHC, is currently a guest Professor at the Tilburg University Center of Pastoral Care in the Faculty of Theology and a member of the Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles, as well as part of the Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). He was a member of the evaluation committees for the EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme For Eastern Partnership project.

EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme For Eastern Partnership – why is there such an acute need for this project?

Covid-19 particularly affects vulnerable people. Among the most vulnerable people are people in closed institutions- penitentiary institutions, psychiatric hospital, detention centres for immigrants, etc. Those who stay there are vulnerable not only because of the incarceration itself, but also because they are given a low priority in Covid-19 protection and treatment measures. In many countries there is a lack of face masks, disinfectants, gloves, footwear, technical equipment etc. The persons living in those closed institutions have to accept that they are living in a complete isolation, excluded from essential contacts with the outside world. Monitoring bodies and complaints bodies can barely perform their work, which also puts the protection of human rights under pressure. The EU Covid-19 Solidarity program is an important tool to support NGOs to reduce the negative effects of the virus, especially with regard to vulnerable people in vulnerable living circumstances.



Above: Anton van Kalmthout,
Senior Expert for the NHC.
Photo courtesy vught.nieuws.nl

“The EU Covid-19 Solidarity program is an important tool to support NGOs to reduce the negative effects of the virus, especially with regard to vulnerable people in vulnerable living circumstances.”

Anton van Kalmthout



Why do you think the NHC will be a particularly valuable partner in this project?

The expertise of the NHC, its network and experience in assessing subsidy applications offers a necessary guarantee that thrifty resources are properly distributed and spent. The assessment of applications requires a careful and objective procedure. the NHC guarantees this.

The project recognizes the invaluable role of local CSOs in service delivery, community mobilization, awareness raising, policy engagement and advocacy for the protection of human rights and civic freedoms during and in the post-pandemic environment. Could you briefly elaborate on this need and the priorities for capacity building in this context?

NGOs have an important role to play in the protection of human rights and civic freedoms. This in particular when it concerns the protection of people in closed institutions. NGOs often form the only link between people in closed institutions

and civil society, monitor the way people in closed institutions are being treated, raise abuse with the responsible authorities, and act as a mouthpiece to authorities, media and society. The most important priority also in the post-pandemic period is that NGOs have unlimited and uncensored access to all those who reside in closed institutions and have sufficient resources to carry out their important work.

What do you hope will be the biggest outcome of this project for the beneficiaries?

The projects that have been approved are aimed at reducing the effects of the Covid-19 virus in the short term. At the same time, the applications also make it clear that a number of problems are of a structural nature and that also require attention after the pandemic. It would be an important outcome if the NGOs involved saw their efforts to combat the pandemic rewarded with structural recognition and support from their own national authorities and international organizations.

Above: EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme for Eastern Partnership – Georgian Women in Business face mask project.

2020 Programme Highlights

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, in Serbia, a pre-trial report was produced in a pilot in Novi Sad. During the trial, the judge followed the advice of the probation service. Later that year two other pre-trial advisory reports were produced. In Ukraine, with the help of the NHC, a massive event was organised in Kiev to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Probation Service, which attracted around 200 visitors. Due to a great (social) media coverage, the event contributed to the visibility of probation in Ukraine.

Prison reform projects continued in the Western Balkans; they focused on improving the possibilities for juvenile detainees to successfully re-enter society. With participation of NHC's partner organizations Young in Prison and Leiden University of Applied Sciences we redesigned many trainings for online use. We also provided the Albanian Ministry of Justice with institutional support in pursuing reform.

The EPTA project allowed for further professionalization of the EPTA network, with a first online annual meeting by the end of 2020. The EPTA Special Interest Groups came up with a comparison of European trainings in leadership, managing difficult inmates and dynamic security and highlighted some best practices. They provided a description of minimum standards for training on these topics and a practical handbook for developing training curricula.

In Armenia a project started on creating essential conditions to modernise prison and probation so that the Armenian Ministry of Justice is able to establish a modern criminal sanctioning system that makes societies safer by reducing recidivism.

As part of the EU Covid-19 Solidarity Programme for Eastern Partnership NHC joint forces with People in Need (PIN), and AFEW International (AFEW) to propose a set of interventions in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. NHC focused on prisoners and ex-prisoners and entities and organisations involved in counselling and rehabilitating them, and on people in mental health institutions, their relatives and organisations, and mental health professionals.

Left: Ukraine celebrated its fifth anniversary of probation with a first open forum in March 2020.
Right: 2020 EPTA Annual Conference took place online on 28 and 29 September 2020.



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

The Civic Solidarity Platform in the Year of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) brings together non-governmental organizations committed to improving the human rights situation in Europe, Eurasia and North America. Its aim is to serve as a conduit through which civic activists can build alliances, strengthen mutual support and solidarity, and improve their influence on national and international human rights policy.

Harry Hummel is Senior Policy Officer at the NHC, and part of the Human Rights Defence programme leading the Secretariat of the CSP.

Could you tell us a more about the work of the CSP (over the past year)? What were the main topics you focused on as the Secretariat?

The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), focuses on using advocacy opportunities in the OSCE. As an international organisation, the OSCE offers many opportunities for NGOs to take part in meetings and share their views. This aspect of our activities has been somewhat hampered by Covid-19, as events and meetings were cancelled or moved online. However, the second big chunk of work for the CSP, calling on governments to stop abuses and invoking the use of OSCE

mechanisms as a vehicle to this end, have been far less negatively impacted by the pandemic. In particular, the work of the CSP network in and around the situation in Belarus in the past year, and bringing this to the attention of relevant international bodies, stands out. For example, just one day after the elections in Belarus last August, the CSP issued a statement calling on OSCE participating states to invoke the Moscow Mechanism. As we now know, 17 states used this procedure, with as a direct result the production of the Moscow Mechanism report at the end of October, followed by a number of online follow ups by the CSP; with the discussion of next steps still ongoing. The CSP is still very much focusing on keeping the Moscow Mechanism report on the agenda of the states that invoked it, as well as the broader OSCE agenda. Our interaction with the OSCE and solidarity with members was unwavering in the face of the pandemic.

What did you find member organisations within the CSP network struggled most with over the past year, and how has the CSP been able to step in?

I truly believe the CSP to be an international actor of importance, and one of the actors that can take action in



*Above: Harry Hummel,
NHC Senior Policy Adviser.*

“[The CSP] campaigned for the establishment of an international Accountability Mechanism for human rights abuses in Belarus, and called attention to human rights abuses and crackdowns in the country targeting the democratic movement.”

Harry Hummel



cases when many others might not be able to. Amplifying the voices of our members in and alongside organisations such as the OSCE and the UN is even more vital for states such as Belarus and Kazakhstan, which are not members of the Council of Europe (an organisation traditionally more geared towards tackling human rights abuses) – and especially so in this past year. As an example, during a recent wave of repression in Kazakhstan, brought on by toughened anti NGO legislation, the CSP was part of an international wave of pressure, which ultimately helped lead to the reconsideration of the repressive policy by the Kazakhstani government.

This year was unprecedented in many ways, but for the CSP perhaps even more so, due not least to the events in Belarus last August. Could you give us a brief overview of how the CSP has been involved in supporting the Belarusian democratic movement?

The CSP issued a statement calling for OSCE member states to invoke the Moscow Mechanism just one day after the elections in Belarus. The network and some individual members have

been working tirelessly to keep Belarus high on the international agenda since early August. We have focused on the discussion and the follow up to the Moscow Mechanism report, worked to facilitate discussion between the Belarusian democratic movement and western European politicians to broaden the scope of the advocacy agenda, successfully campaigned for the establishment of an international Accountability Mechanism for human rights abuses in Belarus, and brought attention to human rights abuses and crackdowns in the country targeting the democratic movement.

The CSP's agenda when it comes to Belarus has in particular been focused on the toughening of sanctions, CSO support, and international civic solidarity, by for instance campaigning for international cultural, academic and sports' relations to be geared toward the new democratic Belarus, rather than linked with the current regime. One example of this, and one of the biggest results of international campaigning in the past 6 months, by predominately the Belarusian diaspora, has been the withdrawal of the world championship in ice hockey from Belarus.

Above: Protest in support of the democratic leadership on Belarus. The Hague September 2020.



As we still struggle with the aftershocks and in some cases second and third waves of the pandemic, what are your hopes for the coming year as the Secretariat of the CSP, and for civil society in the region as a whole?

Of course, as in the past year, we will strive to keep Belarus high on the agenda, as this is still and perhaps increasingly so important. Another matter that the CSP will be focusing on more closely is looking at human rights through the prism of (anti) corruption. During the last Ministerial Council of the OSCE in December 2020, the CSP (as in all previous years) held a parallel Civil Society conference, this time adopting the Tirana Declaration (named after the capital of country presiding over the OSCE). This year, the Declaration focused on “Human Rights, Democracy and the Fight against Corruption”,

the latter being a platform not dealt with in the past by the CSP. Following also the NHC’s involvement in the recent report on trans border corruption, as the Secretariat of the CSP we hope to initiate a floor discussion of the Tirana Declaration with members on this particular topic and stimulate even more thinking in the OSCE and with our members on issues of corruption. We also hope to evolve our advocacy agenda on matters of Climate Justice, expanding on the thinking of the current CSP working group on this topic. I believe it to be of paramount importance for civil society and the human rights movement to get a better grip on climate justice issues and include these more systematically in the type of analyses we do. There is no lack of ambition or commitment for the CSP going forward!

Above: Cover of the Tirana Declaration, adopted by the CSP in December 2020.

2020 Programme Highlights and Activities

Despite the challenges faced by the global community in 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis, the year was also a milestone in terms of reclaiming rights, defending democracy, and expressions of solidarity, with demonstrations and protests taking place around the globe.

In this context, the NHC's the Human Rights Defence Programme continued its work in honing home the notion that human rights apply equally to all, and that all can take up the mantle of defending human rights. This manifested in a variety of communications materials, capacity-building trainings, lessons-learned exchanges, and facilitations of advocacy discussions with national and international bodies, including the Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations among others.

Special attention was focused on supporting those who uphold and defend human rights, including through strengthening communications and advocacy skills, advocating for the robust support to human rights defenders and anti-corruption activists, and providing ad hoc legal, psychological, and moral support to individual human rights defenders at risk, particularly in countries where an increasing crackdown against civil society has been taking place, including Turkey, Belarus, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. Throughout the year a variety of these skills were put to practice.

In Turkey, a compelling storytelling campaign, "Stories that need to be heard," culminated in the launch of a virtual exhibition showcased during an online conference with some of the human rights defenders who had been profiled: www.hrdstories.org. The campaign will be rounded off with the production of a publication featuring the personal stories and experiences of 20 activists working to ensure human rights in the country. We also worked to strengthen the constituencies, supporter bases, financial sustainability, and good governance mechanisms of civil society; enhance the use of policy-influencing strategies towards national authorities by civil society; and increase the operational resilience of civil society in countries where the human rights paradigm itself is under threat. The HRD programme continued to expand and deepen its networks of civil society to collectively advocate in support of the rule of law and human rights in and towards both the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Left: In March 2020, the Human Rights Club and the NHC submitted recommendations to the EU External Action Service ahead of the annual EU-Azerbaijan Human Rights Dialogue.

Right: In the Fall of 2020, the NHC co-organized a series of panel discussions on the topic of "Shrinking Democratic Space and International Solidarity".



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

Left: MaTra ROLT training moves fully online in 2020.

Feature Interview

Reflections from MaTra ROLT Alumna Natasha Metodijeva on the Online Training

The Matra Rule of Law Training Programme is designed to strengthen institutional capacity in the field of rule of law within government organisations in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine. To this end, various training programmes are offered per year, each introducing the participants to best practices in a wide range of rule of law themes. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 and subsequent travel bans, the training has moved fully online. Natasha Metodijeva is an alumna of the MaTra RoLT 2020 cycle. She currently works as an Associate in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the Republic of North Macedonia and recently participated in the online Rule of Law training on *Human Rights and Minorities*.

Ms Metodijeva, what motivated you to take part in the programme, and do you feel your expectations were met?

Before applying to this programme, I had heard great things about it, which further motivated me to apply. The programme took place under different circumstances – during the Covid-19 pandemic – and I can freely say that enough efforts have been made to successfully implement the programme.

What aspects of the course did you find most motivating and beneficial to your work?

The benefit of the course is that it adds value to my professional work. I really enjoyed the case studies, where I individually dealt with human rights issues and situations. We were challenged with individual and group assignments that asked us to respect human rights and uphold public service at the same time. Those were some of the assignments of this course that I found most motivating and beneficial for my professional work.

This was the first time a Rule of Law Training module took place entirely online. What did you find different or surprising about following a training online in contrast to in person?

It was a challenge for all of us! Lectures and materials were published on the platform at the very beginning of each week. Lecturers were recorded in high quality videos and their lectures reflected the essence of the lessons. Furthermore, all the lecturers were high-ranking officials and professional representatives from the Netherlands. Often after the lectures, I took part in an online working group where we had to finish



Above: Natasha Metodijeva, MaTra ROLT alumna and Associate in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the Republic of North Macedonia.

“As a participant, the online platform gave me a feeling of safety during the course and all modules were implemented without any serious obstacles.”

Natasha Metodijeva



assignments to a deadline. What surprised us the most was the way we managed to work successfully in groups online, bearing in mind that we were all from different countries. The useful online platform, made by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, was reachable at any time and from any place. As a participant, the online platform gave me a feeling of safety during the course and all modules were implemented without any serious obstacles.

If you had to choose one – what would you say was your biggest takeaway or most positive experience from the training?

My biggest takeaway is the implementation of the Action Plan that I created and that I had to present at the end of the programme. My expectation is that with the implementation of an Action Plan I can contribute even more to the improvement of human rights.

My most positive experience of the training was the assignment in which I had to advise the Mayor of Amsterdam

on whether to allow the “Black Lives Matter” protests to take place during Covid-19 pandemic. In this case I can proudly say that I got positive feedback and was part of an excellent debate. One of my pieces of advice was even taken into consideration to be a part of the city of Amsterdam’s future operating procedures. This motivates me even further! I am a keen proponent of innovation in general, as I believe it drives progress.

The Matra Rule of Law Training Programme is designed and delivered by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Leiden Law School and The Hague Academy for Local Governance. It is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, for the period 2017- 2021. For questions relating to the Matra Rule of Law Training Programme or application process please email: Matrarolt (AT) nhc (DOT) nl.

[Read here](#) for an interview from NHC Programme Officer Marco Lambooi on challenges and opportunities faced by the ROLT team in successfully adapting to the new, fully online environment.

Left: Art Bridge, Skopje, North Macedonia.

Right: BLM Protest June 2020, Dam Square Amsterdam.

2020 Programme Highlights

This year, we started a number of new projects and initiatives as part of the Integrity and Accountability Programme.

We launched a project on **Strengthening Media Freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia**, together with Free Press Unlimited. We work together with institutions from The Netherlands to strengthen associations of journalists, civil society and judicial academies in these three countries.

The programme also further promoted the rule of law within the EU, by engaging national parliaments within the EU and encouraging a closer inter-parliamentary coordination on key rule of law issues. This led to a set of recommendations for Parliaments to further advance the rule of law within the Union. We co-authored a civil society contribution on checks and balances in The Netherlands as part of the consultation the European Commission launched preparing its first **EU Rule of Law report**.

In our Virtual Insanity project, led by the European Partnership for Democracy, we contributed to the development of effective EU level policy aimed at guaranteeing transparency in digital political advertising. We did this through research and discussions amongst all relevant stakeholders, from public institutions, academia, and civil society, at both the national and European levels.

Finally, we 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 5 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. Because of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the programme was redesigned mid-way into a fully online programme. We held two trainings in this way, on Human Rights and Minorities and on Decentralisation and Citizen Participation.

Left: MaTra ROLT Online Training Trailer Video. **Right:** Cover of Virtual Insanity report.



The Hague Academy for
local governance

MATRA RULE OF LAW TRAINING PROGRAMME



Transparency in Digital
Political Advertisements during
the 2019 European Parliament
Elections

Country Report on the Netherlands



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.



The readership of the SHRM website soared over the course of 2020.

Articles on the leadership crisis and vacuum in the OSCE, the “Open Letter to the Foreign Ministers of the 57 participating States of the OSCE, by former Directors of its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights” and the exclusive article on the “Eleven candidates considered for the top OSCE posts” generated more than 7000 unique views/clicks from new readers in just 3 months’ time.

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

2020 Interviews



We want to help the OSCE focus again on real substance and on doing its job

Roberto Montella
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Secretary General

Photo: OSCE PA



Interview with UK Ambassador to the OSCE on the Moscow mechanism

Neil Bush
United Kingdom Ambassador to the OSCE

Photo: USOSCE/Gower



The U.S. withdrawal from international treaties is a myth

James Gilmore III
United States (U.S.) Ambassador to the OSCE

Photo: USOSCE/Public Affair



The biggest fans of the OSCE have never been to Hofburg

Ambassador Paul Bekkers
former Director of the OSCE Office of the Secretary General

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell



Reform of scales of contribution is almost achieved

Lukáš Parížek
Slovak State Secretary

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell

2020 Analysis/Opinion



Future of Europe's largest human rights conference at stake

Harry Hummel
NHC Senior Policy Advisor



The OSCE is dysfunctional – but necessary

Dennis Sammut
Director at LINKS
(Dialogue, Analysis and Research)



Open Letter to the Foreign Ministers of the 57 participating States of the OSCE, by former Directors of its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

By the five former Directors of ODIHR

Photo: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev



Will the OSCE mediate in Belarus?

Stephanie Liechtenstein
Diplomatic Correspondent and Journalist,
Web Editor in Chief SHRM



Exclusive: Eleven candidates considered for top OSCE posts

Stephanie Liechtenstein
Diplomatic Correspondent and Journalist,
Web Editor in Chief SHRM

Photo: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev



The OSCE Ministerial Council and Year in Review: Virtual Diplomacy and the Limits of Cooperative Security

Stephanie Liechtenstein
Diplomatic Correspondent and Journalist,
Web Editor in Chief SHRM

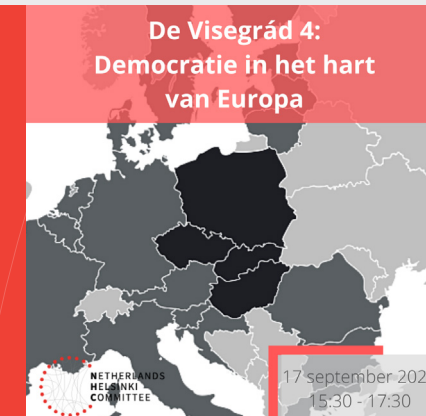
Photo: OSCE

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**, below are three statements underpinning our viewpoint as to how this can be achieved, with highlights of our networking and advocacy activities in 2020 and how they have contributed to our mission:

1. We believe that Covid-19 has put fundamental human rights under pressure around the world, and that while it is important to curb the spread of the coronavirus, that **we must** at the same time **ensure there is no lasting damage to our fundamental human rights that are to be universally protected.**

As such we formulated recommendations for the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Dutch Parliament prior to their review of the 2021 budget for Foreign Affairs, contributed to the report on “Imagined continuities: Political scenarios after the Covid-19 pandemic” and underwrote several joint statements on the use of emergency powers in Hungary, advocating for democracy to be seen as an integral part of the response to the Coronavirus, and calling for urgent attention for the situation in prisons in Covid-19 crisis.



Above: Democracy in the Heart of Europe online event with Ambassadors and experts on the Visegrád counties.

2. We believe in the rule of law and that governments should respect the separation of powers.

We got together with civil society organisations from across the European Union to stop the backsliding of the rule of law – now more pertinent than ever. In 2020, we organised meetings for civil society organisations in Croatia, Slovenia and Portugal and worked together to improve cooperation and garner more attention for Rule of Law among national EU Parliaments. We contributed to the European Commission Rule of Law report, and continued to raise awareness on the implications of the adoption of the new Rule of Law policy instrument, through several analyses from law expert and NHC Committee Member Jaap de Zwaan. Furthermore, director Pepijn Gerrits spoke to RTL Z News about the rising tensions between Hungary and the EU, Programme Manager Joeri Buhrer Tavanier spoke to “Le Monde” and Dutch NPO 1 radio on the ongoing protests in Bulgaria. Finally, in September 2020 – two years after Article 7 procedure against Hungary was launched – we hosted an online panel discussion with experts and Dutch ambassadors to the Visegrád countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Czech Republic) about the rule of law and democracy in the heart of Europe entitled “The Visegrád 4: Democracy in the Heart of Europe”.

3. We believe that the current situation in Belarus calls for sustained attention from the international community and unwavering support for a peaceful and democratic transition in the country.

As the Secretariat of the Civic Solidarity Platform, the NHC has been vocal since the 09 August undemocratic elections in Belarus; calling for invoking the Moscow Mechanism to investigate the events surrounding the elections in Belarus, writing to the Dutch Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee calling for sustained and enhanced initiatives in support of the Belarusian democracy movement, and joining the member of CSP in calling on Belarusian authorities for the immediate release of Human Rights Defender Marfa Rabkova. In November 2020, the NHC facilitated meeting between Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian democratic movement, and representatives of Dutch civil society organisations, parliamentarians, Labour Unions and sports organisations; discussing ways in which we can combine solidarity, support and political action from the Netherlands and the EU to the citizens of Belarus.

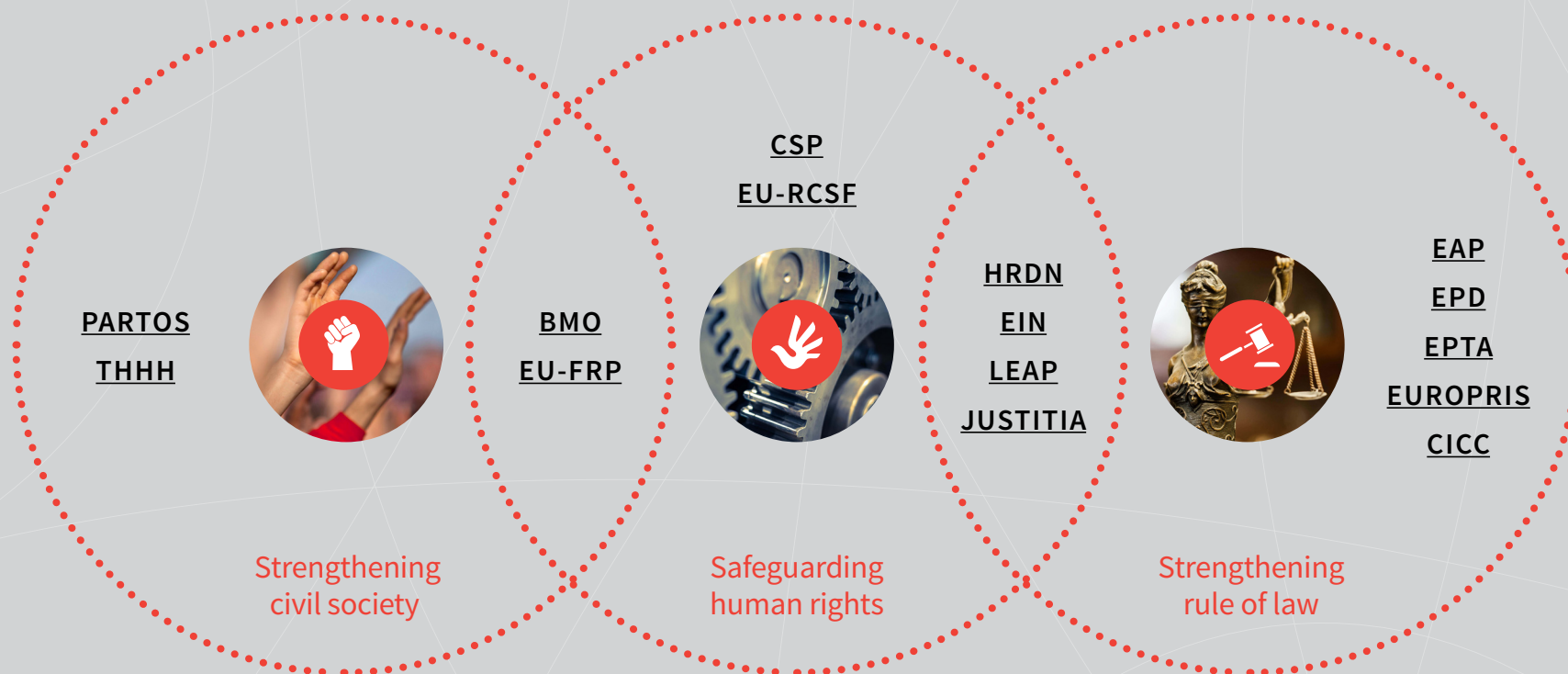
“There are numerous parallels between the Visegrád-4 and the BeNeLux, and the story that we [as ambassadors of the BeNeLux countries] wish to show is that as the BeNeLux, we are able to cooperate successfully despite sometimes fundamentally disagreeing. Despite our differences, we can come to compromises”

Daphne Bergsma, Dutch Ambassador in Poland during the NHC's event on 'Democracy in the heart of Europe'.

Listen to the full podcast [here](#).

Our network

NHC participates in 15 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 Network
CICC	Coalition for the International Criminal Court
CSP	Civic Solidarity Platform
EAP	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
THHH	The Hague Humanity Hub

Secretariat
BMO (Netherlands Human Rights Network); Civic Solidarity Platform; facilitates the EPTA network

Board Member
EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

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)

Anne Maljers (Vice-chair)

Angela Kaptein (until August 2020)

Tamara Trotman (since August 2020)

Marjolijn van Oordt

Eric Rijnders

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



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Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein to the OSCE and to the UN



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