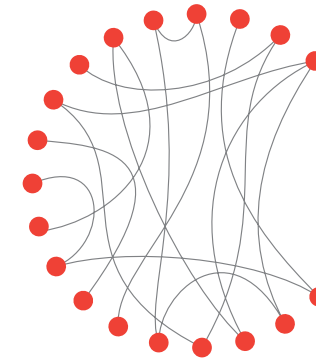


Netherlands Helsinki Committee Annual Report 2021  
*Democracy, Human Rights, and the fundamental  
underpinnings of the Rule of Law*



**NETHERLANDS  
HELSINKI  
COMMITTEE**

Access to Justice



Integrity & Accountability

Human Rights Defence



Criminal Justice Reform



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## From the Director(s): Goodbye and Hello

### Looking back on 2021

**Pepijn Gerrits, Executive Director and Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee until December 2021**

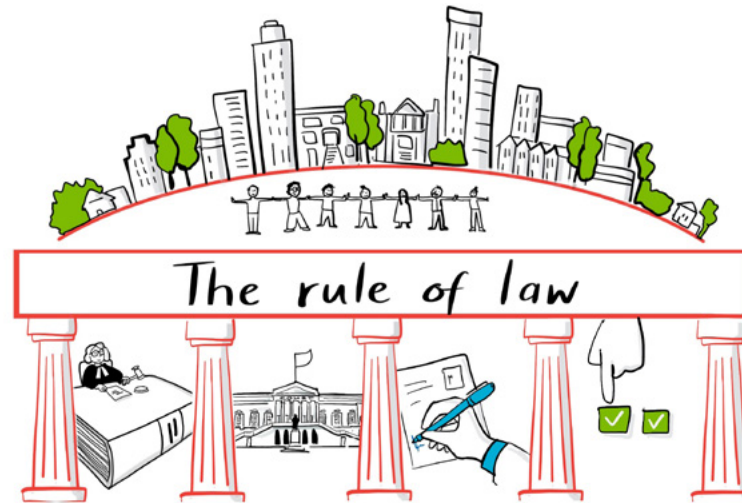
**2021** was a year of transition, both in the world, and here at the Netherlands Helsinki Committee. We came out of 2020 strengthened in our resolve to continue **promoting human rights and strengthening the rule of law and democracy** in the OSCE, now adapted to new ways of working, and with renewed determination to continue with the many impactful activities and projects that inspire meaningful change in the region.

In this year's Annual Report, we give you an overview of our work, 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. We focus on the topic of **Rule of Law** – within the EU and beyond – and how our work with partners



and experts on this topic has resulted in strategic advocacy, campaigning, and impactful actions. You will read about our work on finalizing MaTra Rule of Law trainings through leadership course reflections from a participant from **Moldova**, working with partners and experts in **Ukraine** on promoting and safeguarding human rights, on enabling effective rehabilitation through education for juvenile offenders in **Kosovo**, supporting the introduction of risk assessment instruments and pre-trial reporting in the development of a viable probation system in **Serbia**, and bringing to a close a project focused on countering discrimination and protecting LGBTIQ+ rights in **Albania**.

Our focus on the rule of law, both in our advocacy efforts in the past year, and in this Report, is anything but accidental. **The Rule of Law ensures guarantees for citizens to live in a democracy**. And yet, we seem to have come to take certain principles of the rule of law for granted. At its core, rule of law is:  
- A strong, independent and accessible legal system: where judges are free of political and economic constraints and able to form fair and independent judgement, and where everyone has the possibility for free legal representation in court.



- A political system free of corruption and nepotism: where officials serve the public and act in the best interest of citizens.
- A critical civil society and a free press: where citizens can inform themselves, criticise and hold to account those in power.

Respect for the rule of law is important always and everywhere, but in the EU it is also a fundamental part of the agreement entered into by each and every member state. On both a local and international level, the rule of law is a key ingredient of life in a democracy – it forms the core of our trust in one another and the society we live in.

Protection of the rule of law is a *sine qua non* for safeguarding the EU values enshrined in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. **If disrespect for rule of law continues, it opens the door for even greater violations of fundamental rights and the erosion of our democracies.** This threatens the internal market and the financial stability of the Union, because

it corrodes confidence of investors in the EU’s reputation and the single market. It is high time for the EU to focus on enforcement. It is time to *act*. Civil society stands ready to assist EU institutions to fully operationalise their role as the guarantors of the treaties, and to assist Member States in bringing the discussion to the forefront.

And with this, I sign off on my last Annual Report at the NHC. After six very productive and enjoyable years, I decided the time had come for a new challenge. I am confident I leave behind a strong and committed organisation and staff (alongside a proactive Supervisory Board and Committee) that has remained true to its core values, while building a future-proof model of operations for years to come. Best of luck!

### Pepijn Gerrits

*Executive Director / Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee until December 2021*

*Page 3 left:*  
Pepijn Gerrits, NHC Executive Director/Chair of the Board until December 2021.

*Page 3 right:* High-Level Conference on the ‘Rule of Law in Europe,’ Coimbra, Portugal.

*Above left:* ‘Conversations on Human Rights and Why they Matter’ Online Event for the Bring Human Rights Home Campaign.

*Above centre:* Explaining the Rule of Law.

*Above right:* The NHC supervisory board members demand release of Human Rights Center Viasna members.





## Looking forward to 2022 and beyond

Kirsten Meijer, Executive Director and  
Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Helsinki  
Committee since February 2022

**A**s I am writing this, we are witnessing some of the gravest atrocities in recent history being committed in a country very close to our hearts. We are grieving for what is happening to the people of Ukraine, including many of our close partners, colleagues, and friends. We expressed our **deepest solidarity** with all those affected by this terrible war, and the regimes of Putin and Lukashenka, and we have and will continue to stay in close contact with our partners to identify how we can support them in these dark days.

At the core of what we stand for, and in the spirit of the Helsinki Movement, is the belief that real security and therefore sustainable, lasting peace can only be achieved by

building democratic, free and rights-respecting societies. The war in Ukraine has shown that **freedom and democracy can never be taken for granted**, which makes our mission for human rights, and open and just societies now more relevant than ever.

In recent years, we have seen the **political opposition to the concept of human rights and the rule of law growing stronger not only in Russia, but also in Turkey** and in certain EU Member States. As the NHC, we believe that we must continue to offer a stronger platform to civic society to counteract the shrinking civic space, and to better shield civil society organisations and Human Rights Defenders from attacks in those countries where civic space and the rule of law are under pressure. **We must do so precisely in order to stop the rise of autocratic regimes such as Putin's, in Europe and beyond, with all institutions and mechanisms at our disposal.**

*Above: Kirsten Meijer, NHC Executive Director/Chair of the Board since February 2022.*



**#STANDWITHUKRAINE**

**#STANDWITHUKRAINE**

We welcome that the sanction list has been expanded with the addition of Russian oligarchs previously identified in our project on Transborder corruption. We will continue our work aimed at **stopping the flow of money to Russia's war machine by tackling (trans-border) corruption as the human rights issue that it is.** We know that the trend for growing autocracy is closely intertwined with the rise of kleptocracy, in which political-economic elites enrich themselves through the state, by limiting political, judicial and social control, and criticism. The Netherlands, and the EU, must do more to stop the flow of money through Dutch and European (financial) institutions, systems and companies, and wake up to the fact that this money is now directly financing human rights violations and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In these dark days, it is good to know that **we are not alone.** Together with our networks, alliances and

partnerships we can amplify the voices of those fighting to **build and secure justice, uphold human rights, and preserve democracy,** and this is exactly what we will continue to do with all the energy that we have.

Together we stand strong, and there is great potential to enable change. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to contribute and I am very much looking forward to working with staff, partners and the Supervisory Board and Committee in the years to come, on solidifying the strategic course of the organization and adjusting it to new realities, and most importantly, on continuing with activities and projects that give meaning to our motto: **Building and securing justice across Europe.**

**Kirsten Meijer**

*Executive Director / Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee since February 2022*

*Above: #standwithukraine.*

## NHC at a Glance

### Programmes by Country/Region 2017 - 2021

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

### Activities Data 2021

**4**

### Programmes

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

**15+**  
Projects

**20+**  
Countries

**100+**  
Partners  
*NGOs/CSOs and political institutions*



## Who We Are and Where We Came From



### Who We Are:

#### The Netherlands **Helsinki** Committee

Our mission is to strengthen the rule of law, safe-guard human rights, and build the capacity of civil society, in Europe and among OSCE participating states. Established in 1987, we represent 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, by looking at the big picture and taking a holistic approach.

### 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**.



## Building bridges – NHC Networking and Advocacy



**W**e 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 statements underpinning our viewpoint as to how this can be achieved, with highlights of our networking and advocacy activities in 2021 and how they have contributed to our mission.

### 1. The political opposition to the concept of human rights and to the rule of law is growing stronger.

This position is most visible in the largest European countries, Russia and Turkey, as well as in several EU Member States. **We believe that we must offer a stronger platform to civic society to counteract the shrinking civic space, and to better shield CSOs and HRDs from attacks in those countries where civic space and the rule of law are under pressure.** Within the EU, we believe part of the solution are the Reports on the Rule of Law in each Member State, which look at the judiciary, anti-corruption framework and media landscape in a detailed manner. Similarly, we believe in the creation of an EU policy framework for civic space in the Union to ensure a secure space for civil society to play its role more effectively. As such, we continued to co-organise the Recharging advocacy for Rights in Europe (RARE) network; designed to respond to ever-growing threats to the EU's foundations of high

*Above: What is Rule of Law;  
An infographic. Learn more:  
<https://youtu.be/nGOTD6kuBcU>*

democratic standards and human rights protection. We once again contributed to the Rule of Law report on the Netherlands, as one of the Member States' Rule of Law reports that forms the basis of the Commission's report mentioned above. This year, the report highlighted in particular the need for increased transparency when it comes to political lobbying in the Netherlands, as well as enforcement of judicial prosecution for foreign perpetrators of (bribery) crimes under employment/instruction of Dutch companies. We are in touch with the Dutch Parliament and Government to foster debates on the Rule of Law. Finally, we continued to bring to the forefront the stories of human rights defenders in Europe and beyond, through our Bring Human Rights Home campaign, the Stories that Need to be Heard, as well as our joint project on monitoring the persecution of human rights and anti-corruption activists in Ukraine.

**2. Both the construct of, and institutions safeguarding international human rights standards and procedures, are under increasing pressure. We believe that, within Europe, both the Council of Europe and the EU must prioritize the enforcement of human rights, the rule of law and democracy within its own ranks.**

It similarly remains important that OSCE and United Nations mechanisms put in place to protect human rights are defended and, where necessary, strengthened. Finally, we remain concerned with how the EU as a whole, and the Netherlands specifically, prioritize support for human rights,

the rule of law and democracy in their bilateral foreign policy. The NHC therefore focused in the past year on amplifying the voices of those fighting to protect human rights, and calling attention to strengthening the systems in place, and putting to use the mechanisms at our disposal to ensure that the rule of law, democracy and human rights continue to be protected in the EU and beyond. We highlighted this through our participation in the first High-Level Rule of Law Conference in Coimbra, the Fundamental Rights Forum 2021, contributing to an open letter to the European Commission on the Hungarian Resilience and Recovery Facility Plan, and co-signing an open letter to Vera Jourova, Vice President Values and Transparency EU Commission, on the EU's new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, among other activities.

**3. The trend for increased autocracy goes hand in hand with the rise of kleptocracy, in which political-economic elites enrich themselves through the state, by limiting political, judicial and social control, and criticism.**

We believe that corruption not only threatens the rule of law and democracy in the countries where these trends are visible, but also creates an uneven playing field for companies operating with integrity and can lead to the 'buying' of economic and political influence across borders. **We believe that to protect the rule of law and preserve and strengthen democracy across Europe, fighting the various forms of corruption of**

*"We believe that to protect the rule of law and preserve and strengthen democracy across Europe, fighting the various forms of corruption of political-economic elites is essential. Stronger policies are needed and possible, both aimed at corruption within the EU and in relation to third countries, from which corrupt financial flows often reach the EU."*

Find out more on our work on anti-corruption [here](#).



**political-economic elites is essential.** Stronger policies are needed and possible, both aimed at corruption within the EU and in relation to third countries, from which corrupt financial flows often reach the EU. In response, the NHC has joined the [UN Convention Against Corruption Coalition](#), and published a [report on Trans-border Corruption](#), which was launched at a [webinar with members of the European Parliament](#).

**4. Finally, we believe that the values, standards and procedures that the Dutch government pursues internationally must also be pursued in Dutch domestic policy and reflected on in the Rule of Law report.**

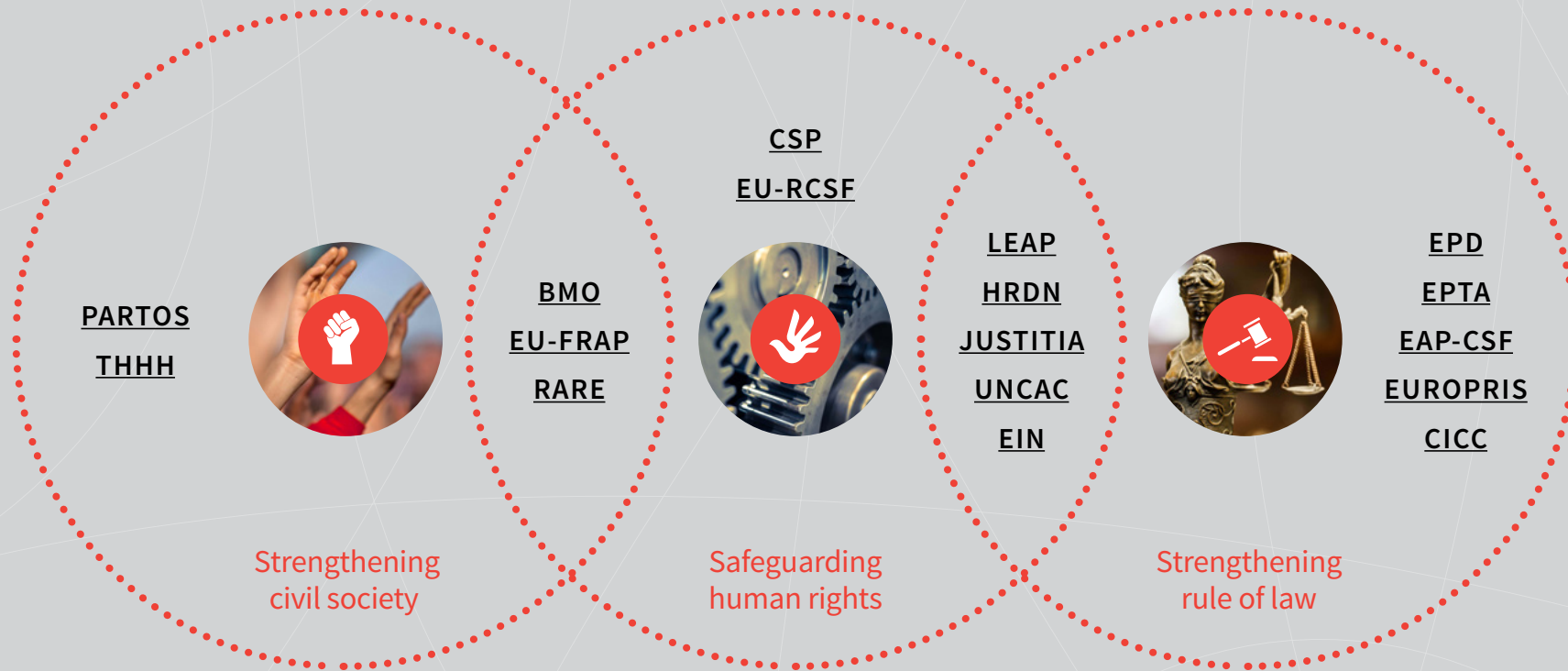
This is not only necessary to be internationally credible with positions on and activities in the field of human rights, but also to counter problems that do exist in the protection of human rights, the rule of law and democracy

in our country. As such, the NHC has raised attention to issues within the Netherlands in the past year, through our [#BringHumanRightsHome](#) campaign, which also focused on a case of [human rights violation in the Netherlands](#), as well as through an advocacy campaign calling for [prevention of torture in closed institutions in the Netherlands through the establishment of a fully independent supervisory body \(National Preventative Mechanism\)](#). We joined with other members of the Netherlands Human Rights Network in a [pre-election call to Dutch politicians for a human rights pledge](#), and joined the Dutch [#GreenLight](#) campaign calling for safe passage of refugees on International Human Rights Day. We have and will continue to call attention to, at home and abroad, human rights violation and rule of law backsliding, and will continue to, through our networks, alliances and partnerships, amplify the voices of those fighting to **build and secure justice, uphold human rights, and preserve democracy.**

*Above: Our shared Human Rights Space at Riviervismarkt 4 joined the #GreenLight for refugees campaign on 10 December 2021 - International Human Rights Day.*

### 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-CSF	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EIN	European Implementation Network
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EPTA	European Prison Training Academies Network
EU-FRAP	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
RARE	Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe
THHH	The Hague Humanity Hub
UNCAC	UN Convention Against Corruption

#### Secretariat

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

#### Board Member

EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

## NHC Programmes: Feature Interviews and Highlights



### Access to Justice

*Activism and advocacy for better LGBTIQ+ laws and responsive institutions in Albania*

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### Criminal Justice Reform

*Social climate and education for effective rehabilitation of minors in Kosovo  
Piloting for change: towards effective alternative sanctions in Serbia*

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### Human Rights Defence

*Rule of Law and Human Rights in Ukraine*

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### Integrity and Accountability

*Rule of Law trainings & their legacy: Reflections from Moldova*

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## Access to Justice Programme

**W**e 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: Support for pride in Tirana, Albania.*

*Left: 'Countering Discrimination and Protecting LGBTI Rights in Albania' Closing Conference.*

## Feature Interview with Xheni Karaj, Executive Director of Aleanca and one Albania's foremost LGBTIQ+ activists

### *Activism and advocacy for better LGBTIQ+ laws and responsive institutions in Albania*

Since 2017, the NHC has been working together with COC Netherlands, PRO LGBT Albania and the Albanian State Police on a project aimed at countering discrimination and protecting LGBTIQ+ rights in Albania. This project has focused on strengthening the response of authorities to incidents of hate crime and LGBTI discrimination. As it drew to a close at the end of 2021, we reflected on the project and its successes with Xheni Karaj, Executive Director of Aleanca (Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT people) and one Albania's foremost LGBTIQ+ activists.

Xheni Karaj had not imagined that being an activist was on the cards for her. Growing up, Karaj was not in contact with (m)any LGBTIQ+ people, and it was not until the age of 21 that she came into contact with a same-sex couple working at the American Embassy, through a mutual friend. Karaj herself had only come out to a handful of friends at the time, but out of the connections made in the years to follow, the Aleanca movement was born.

*Was there a moment when you realised that you were an activist?*

In the early days, I would print A4 posters at my day job with slogans like “homophobia is a social disease.” We would then go out at night and paste the posters on walls all around Blloku, the main area of Tirana. I think it was from this first action that I realised I was an activist. Because the next morning we had people pulling down the posters, but we also had people contacting us on Facebook, and I began to understand that this action had an impact. I thought that many people from the community would see the poster and understand that they are not alone, something happening here, people are being organised. It is a moment I will always remember, as it made me feel like I had a purpose in life from that moment on.

*How would you describe the current situation surrounding LGBTIQ+ rights in Albania are there any positive trends that you can identify?*

When we started nobody even knew the term LGBTIQ+ rights, instead everyone was using extremely derogatory terms. Many thought that LGBTIQ+ people did not even



*Above: Xheni Karaj, Co-founder and Executive Director, Aleanca LGBT.*

*“There are still many challenges ahead, but we also have new resources and a new generation that is much more courageous than we were, and accepting of themselves at a much earlier age. The new generation have started to get more organised and more active in the movement, enriching and refreshing the movement with different visions.”*

*Xheni Karaj*





exist in Albania, that is was a ‘western condition’. Nowadays, the community is becoming much more visible, as well as political. We have been advocating a lot throughout the years for better LGBTIQ+ laws and institutions that are more responsive. We have been going on different television shows to raise awareness and to deconstruct stereotypes that were created due to lack of information, ignorance and lack of contact with openly LGBTIQ+ people. We have been working with groups of professionals - for instance, police, teachers, school psychologists and journalists, to deconstruct their own perceptions. I think many things have improved, but there is a real danger still of our institutions and governments just approving policies to tick an EU required box, without actually doing anything on implementation. There are still many challenges ahead, but we also have new resources and a new generation that is much more courageous than we were, and accepting of themselves at a much

earlier age. The new generation have started to get more organised and more active in the movement, enriching and refreshing the movement with different visions.

*What are the biggest changes you have noticed since the start of the ‘Countering discrimination and protecting LGBTI+ rights in Albania’ project?*

One of the best things about this project was its longevity, which gave us the possibility to build up a very good relationship with the police academy and other institutional actors. **We have developed many strong relationships and good contact points over the years, and I am certain we will continue our cooperation even after the project has ended.**

A big benefit of this project is that beyond high level training of police officers, we also conducted trainings of trainers, meaning that the impact of the project can hopefully be felt

*Left: Online event for the International Day against Homophobia, biphobia and Transphobia.*

*Right: Official Launch of police brochure in Albania on policing discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ persons.*

long after the official end date, giving it sustainability. I am very happy about that. A next step for the project might be to continue to work with police that works with communities on the ground.

Another interesting aspect of the project is that some of the trainings focussed heavily on hate crimes, specifically the categorisation of crimes as hate crimes towards LGBTIQ+ people. For the first time, we managed to have trainings with judges and prosecutors. I do not think that has happened before, and that is very important because sometimes the problem lies in other parts of the justice chain (not with the police). Identifying steps that can be made in all parts of the justice chain may just be the beginning, and we still have a long way ahead, but it was a very positive beginning.

*Could you name one take away from the project that has stayed with you?*

Seeing the police officers who initially seemed quite closed off and unapproachable, careful not to say things in the wrong way, now gain interest in the issue, trying to use the right language and actually learn from the case studies we discussed ... The whole process was very interesting; to see how they would change throughout the years, it was a real and palpable impact of the trainings.

*“Our cooperation with the NHC has been very positive and productive, with great communication. It has been very human ... The NHC have been open in accepting requests that we have had, and our ideas to make things more practical or more adaptive to the reality of the situation on the ground. We have had the chance to work with some outstanding professionals; from police officers to judges who conducted the trainings. We learned a lot. It is inspiring to see positive examples from other countries, where people not part of the community still choose to support it. I felt that every group on this process – from our own community, to the police officers, prosecutors and judges, felt seen and not discriminated against. It really has been a very enriching experience.”*

*Xheni Karaj, Executive Director Aleanca  
(Alliance against Discrimination of LGBT people)*



## 2021 Programme Highlights



2021 saw two long-standing Access to Justice projects come to a close. First off, we finalised our work on Countering Discrimination and Protecting LGBTI Rights in Albania. Throughout this project, together with partners, we worked on improving the response of the justice system to incidents of LGBTIQ+ hate crime and discrimination in order to ensure rights of the community are respected. We did this by bringing together Dutch and Albanian

police, enabling a conversation and sharing of best practices on 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. Throughout 2021, activities remained in an online format, including the organisation of high-level roundtables for discussing the future of chain cooperation and responding to recent upsurge of hate crime and discrimination. In May 2021, we organized a joint online event to mark this year's International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), focused on promoting 'Local Action for LGBTI Human Rights.' One of the final high level events for the project was held in September, where we focused on mapping the future of chain cooperation on combating discrimination and hate crime against LGBTIQ+ persons in Albania. The high level roundtable demonstrated that the connections and ties laid down will continue on long after the end of the year, and the groundwork exists to take this further, not in the least through the creation of a working group by local partners to continue the work after the completion of the project.

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. At the start of November 2021, the NHC and partners held a two-day closing conference of our collaborative project – including a workshop with Herman Bolhaar, the Dutch National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking. Meaningful cooperation and connection within the region and within Europe as a whole is especially relevant now that BAN III advocacy efforts have contributed to **the introduction**



**of independent National Rapporteurs on Human Trafficking in both North Macedonia and Serbia.** National Rapporteurs represent the opportunity for local tailored monitoring, reporting and solutions, with the power to network across borders. The closing conference pointed towards promising developments in combatting human trafficking both in the Netherlands and in the Western Balkans. While looking back at the successes of BAN I, II and III, going forward all partners stressed the importance of continued monitoring on human trafficking in the region.

In 2021, we secured 3 new projects for the Access to Justice programme. Firstly a project on **Strengthening the response to domestic violence in Armenia**, to be implemented together with **“Women’s Support Centre”** in Yerevan. This project aims to build the capacity of CSOs, mainly women’s rights organisations, to advocate for the ratification and effective implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention (IC); to strengthen the police and criminal justice response to domestic violence and align the professional practices of CSOs with those of other justice chain actors; and finally, to increase societal awareness about domestic violence and gender equality by facilitating support groups for women and girls across Armenia.

The second project focuses on **improving civil society response to discrimination** as a key condition for the protection and promotion of human rights in **Turkey**. In particular, it aims to **strengthen the capacity of rights-based organisations in complaint handling in discrimination cases, strategic litigation and engaging with the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and to facilitate networking and coalition building**. These enhanced capacities contribute to more resilient CSOs and to the opening of civic, democratic and civil society space in Turkey.

The third project entitled **“Delivering for the future: Strengthening civil society capacities and resilience in Armenia”** is envisioned to become the primary means through which **civil society will help to restore integrity and efficiency in the justice system in Armenia**. In order to strengthen the role of civil society in Armenia in promoting human rights and judicial reform and become an effective force, we aim to achieve that CSOs are empowered to meaningfully engage in the Justice sector reforms (incl. police and criminal justice system) in Armenia as effective, trusted and sustainable independent actors, in order to create a more accountable, transparent and international human rights-compliant justice system in Armenia.

*Above: ‘Countering Discrimination and Protecting LGBTI Rights in Albania’ Closing Conference.*

*Below: ‘Balkans Act Now!- Reflecting on Success and the Road Forward’ Online Closing Conference*



## 2021 Programme Overview



## Criminal Justice Reform Programme

**W**e 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.



**32**  
Members



**2019**

Bulgaria  
Latvia  
Moldova  
Netherlands  
Poland  
Slovakia  
Turkey

**2020**

Luxembourg  
Ukraine (SPS)  
Ukraine (Bila Tserkva)

**2018**

Andorra  
Armenia  
Austria  
Belgium  
Catalonia  
Croatia  
Czech Republic  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Georgia  
Germany: Bavaria  
Ireland  
Italy  
Northern Ireland  
Norway  
Portugal  
Romania  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland

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*Above: Certificate ceremony for members of the Lipjan Education Correctional Centre in Kosovo, after completing a TOPs training, aimed at decreasing the risk of antisocial and delinquent behaviour for incarcerated minors.*

*Left: Members of the EPTA (European Penitentiary Training Academies) network.*

## Feature Interview with Rita Selimi, criminology researcher from Kosovo

### *Social climate and education as the path to effective rehabilitation*

As part of NHC's work on creating a safe and rehabilitative prison environment for juveniles in conflict with the law in Kosovo, our project saw our paths cross with Mirlinda\*. Mirlinda's story is a truly inspiring one, with her courage and resilience resulting in the creation of educational possibilities that would not only affect her own rehabilitation journey, but also those of others. Mirlinda is currently in her third year of university, studying for a degree in Law and Criminology, while serving a sentence at the juvenile facility in Kosovo. She visits the university once a month (as allowed by her sentence), and supplements her studies through tutoring by Rita Selimi, a PhD student at Prishtina University / the University of Amsterdam.

Mirlinda and Rita were brought together by NHC Senior Expert, Professor Peer van der Helm. The NHC met with Rita to learn more about her work on the use of the social climate tool in juvenile detention centres in Kosovo, as well as the story of Mirlinda and her role in changing the landscape of education possibilities available to incarcerated minors in Kosovo.

*Rita, tell us a bit about your PhD, your motivation for pursuing research on criminal justice reform, and how does the topic relate to the social climate tool?*

Throughout my life, I have liked the things that society perceives as unacceptable. I am particularly interested in helping marginalised groups in society, as I don't share views that lead to exclusion. I believe that everyone should have a second chance, so from a young age I was interested in working in/with the prison system. My motivation for the PhD project, besides an interest in research, is that **I would like to change current perceptions and shape the way that Kosovo regards this different and vulnerable group.**

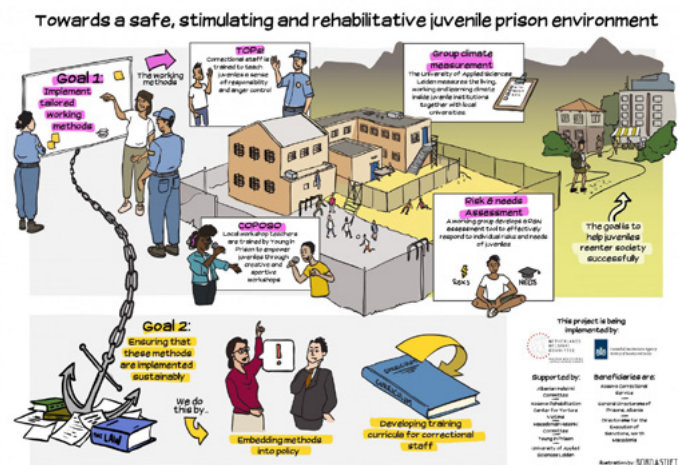
I have focused my research on determination theory and motivation for rehabilitation in juvenile prisons in Kosovo. Self-determination theory distinguishes three needs: autonomy, competency and relatedness. Once those needs are fulfilled, it is much easier to grow as a person and achieve better wellbeing. Therefore, what we try to do is see how this translates within the correctional facilities in Kosovo, how these needs are developed and how they should be developed, in order to provide an effective rehabilitative prison system.



Above: Rita Selimi, PhD student, Prishtina University and the University of Amsterdam.

*“Self-determination theory distinguishes three needs: autonomy, competency and relatedness. Once those needs are fulfilled, it is much easier to grow as a person and achieve better wellbeing. Therefore, what we try to do is see how this translates within the correctional facilities in Kosovo, how these needs are developed and how they should be developed, in order to provide an effective rehabilitative prison system.”*

Rita Selimi



The Social Climate Tool measures how minors living in a closed institutions rate the living environment there. Studies show that if the juveniles have better emotional wellbeing and experience a positive climate while in prison, it results in low rates of recidivism; while the reverse is also true. A negative climate results in a high recidivism rates. Therefore, the project is measuring how the minors perceive the whole experience. **It tries to build on the idea that correctional facilities should give a voice to the minors who live there and to see them as people who have needs, needs that are taken seriously.**

*Your PhD is closely intertwined with the NHC's project on creating a safe and rehabilitative prison environment for juveniles in conflict with the law in Kosovo. What has been the greatest impact of the project, in your opinion?*

Two large impacts. The first is data. It is very important to have empirical evidence in order to make the well-informed

decisions and changes to the system. One of the greatest impacts is that, right now, the staff in the correctional facilities have empirically based feedback on the situation in the prison. Because they can think that they are doing a good job, but it is important to have valid evidence on that. Now they know where they can improve. In addition, if I want to measure other aspects in the juvenile system it is much easier now, because of the processes put in place.

Secondly, incarcerated minors are now being offered the opportunity to achieve higher education. I cannot overstate the importance of this. Three minors from the correctional facility in Kosovo are now pursuing a Bachelor degree. The NHC helped so much, with establishing the connections and funds needed for the first minor, Mirlinda\*. Some projects come and go, however, the work of getting Mirlinda\* into university rolled into other minors attending higher education, which has had a big impact.

*Above: An explanation of our approach as part of our project in Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania on creating a safe, stimulating and rehabilitative prison environment. [Click on this link to see full scale image.](#)*



*What has been the biggest effect of Mirlinda's story?*

When Professor van der Helm together with professor Njomza Llullaku from University of Prishtina visited the correctional facility in Kosovo in 2019, Mirlinda approached him. "I would like to study, do the people in Netherlands study while they are in prison," she asked. He said yes, they can do that. For Mirlinda, that was a surprise. We enrolled Mirlinda in a private university because she wanted to study law with a specific focus on criminology. She is now in her third year of study, and her successes have led to Mirlinda becoming a sensation in correctional facilities across Kosovo, with almost everyone knowing her name.

Mirlinda's case laid the foundation for education opportunities for other incarcerated minors, including two boys aged 19 and 20 who are also working towards gaining a higher education degree while in prison. I can see right now they have more autonomy and can navigate the process of rehabilitation much easier I think as their confidence is raised. It is like what my PhD shows with the determination theory, when you give someone autonomy, they rise to the occasion.

Following Mirlinda's success story, many now feel like they have options. When you interview the minors that are studying, you can see that they have a very concrete plan on what they want to do. It is clear that education offers these children a chance at effective rehabilitation, changing their own perceptions of themselves, as well as societal perceptions of those incarcerated.

*\*Mirlinda is not the minor's real name. It was changed for the purposes of this story.*

*Right: Roundabout in Mitrovica. Image courtesy of Wikimapia.*

*"The support from professor Peer and the project has helped me make my dreams come true, and helped me navigate my integration in society in a way which I believe will lead to a bright future"*

*Mirlinda's statement*

*"The project has had an impact on the juvenile justice system because all of us involved worked towards enhancing the capacities of professional staff working with minors in Kosova, as well as supporting minors towards a better future and social integration. Individually, this project, with the support of my mentors allowed me to shape my academic career in this field, and because of the skills and knowledge gained, I am right now working in a job I always wanted, as a teaching assistant at University of Prishtina"*

*Rita's statement*





## Feature Interview with Marija Petrovic, Local Probation Expert in Serbia

### *Piloting for change in the criminal justice system in 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 contribute to this project to further strengthen 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.

Marija Petrovic is Local Probation Expert with the NHC and an independent consultant, currently involved in the project on Strengthening the Probation and the System of Alternative Sanctions in Montenegro and Serbia. Marija started her work with the OSCE mission to Serbia in 2006, and amongst other projects, worked on a project

introducing alternative sanctions in the criminal justice system in Serbia. Since then, she has worked closely with the Dutch Probation Service as well as NHC's Senior Expert Frans Clobus. After more than 10 years to the OSCE mission in Serbia, Marija joined the NHC as an independent consultant in 2019, helping to implement the project, and strengthening the alternative sanctions systems in Serbia.

*Marija, as part of this project, you were closely involved with a pilot in Novi Sad, Serbia. What can you tell us about the background to this pilot?*

As mentioned, I have been a part of several projects working on introducing and strengthening a viable system of alternative sanctions in Serbia since 2008, first as part of the OSCE mission, and since 2019 as an independent consultant for the NHC. The system introduced in 2008 was something similar to a best European practice, and in line with legislative framework and infrastructure at that time, we actually based our system on that of the Dutch, due to the close cooperation with the Dutch Probation Service. However, we did not continue down the right path, in my opinion. **In 2009, Serbia introduced the Institute of house arrest, i.e. prison sentence at the premises in which the offender lives, which**



*Above: Novi Sad in Serbia was the location of the NHC's pilot project described in this interview. Image courtesy of Wikipedia.*

*“The root of the problem is that, generally, the judicial authorities do not see the safer community as the end of the story. So the strategy when it comes to alternative sanction is to reduce the prison population, which is fair enough, but not just with one sanction that has a 50-70 % rate of re-offending.”*

*Marija Petrovic*



**RISK ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT**  
a short explanation

**The instrument is used by a judge to assess the risk of criminal recidivism**





**Using the questions:**

- 1** How likely is an offender to commit a new offence?
- 2** What can be done to decrease this likelihood?

Look at the following factors:  
**static vs dynamic**

changeable factors:	fixed historical factors:
• age at first offense	• substance abuse
• prior criminal history	• unemployment
	• anti-social peers

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can be imposed with or without electronic monitoring. It was introduced as a modality of imprisonment which enforcement has been entrusted to the Commissioner's service. It has become the most prominent form of alternative sanctions given out in Serbia. I think that for the majority of offenders imposed with, house arrest is not an adequate sanction, as it is not followed up by any treatment or programme – so there is no change in behaviour that could positively affect preventing (re)offending. Reoffending rates following that type of 'alternative sanctions' remain at a very high 60-70%. Other alternative sanctions, such as community work and conditional sentencing with protective supervision are, for many reasons generally overlooked. However, by introducing pre-trial/pre-sentencing reporting, the probation officers would be able to make a funded assessment of all criminogenic and societal factors that could and have influenced the offender's behaviours, and have led to the committing of crimes, and in this way advise the most appropriate alternative sanction programme.

*Was pre-trial reporting and risk assessment the main focus of the Novi Sad pilot programme, in that case?*

We felt that pre-trial, presentencing reporting could make a major change. The pilot in Novi Sad centred on 8 cases, one 'pilot judge', and a 'pilot deputy prosecutor', as well as four participants from the Commissioner's office (Serbian probation service). We received very positive feedback from all involved within the criminal justice chain, especially the four probation officers who told us they could really see the purpose, the benefits of such a report. Within the pilot, the commissioner (i.e. probation) service was involved in every step of the process, even before the indictment is raised, all the way until the sanction is imposed. This isn't normally the case, and I think this makes all the difference. Why? Because, in this case, all the criminogenic factors are scanned and evaluated by the commissioner i.e. probation officers, meaning that adequate sanctions can be imposed and that the probation officers have the necessary information and ability to advise and carry out

*Left: CEP Conference on Probation, October 2021, Prague.*

*Right: Explanation of a Risk Assessment Instrument. For more information, see <https://www.nhc.nl/nhcs-hand-in-the-development-of-the-serbian-probation-service>.*

the sanctions that could best affect the offender's behaviour. Individualisation of a sanction can significantly decrease the risks of reoffending, particularly for the first time offenders. Ultimately, this means a safer society for all!

*What was the biggest takeaway from the pilot project?*

From the pilot and based on these 8 cases we worked on, a proposal for changing the legal framework and introducing amendments to the justice chain that would better reflect the situation described in the pilot. We have created a whole package to be presented to judicial authorities & the Ministry of Justice to decide, to see the benefits of it. So let's hope to move on, to see a proper alternative sanctions, meaningful sanctions that would really serve to prevent reoffending or decrease the rate of reoffending and to have at the very end a safer society.

*And personally?*

Looking at the cases tried during the Novi Sad pilot, the two final cases stuck with me in particular. They were the cases of two elderly ladies who committed theft, each for different reasons, and both as first time offenders. We learned here just how beneficial it was to have the pre-sentencing reports requested by the deputy public prosecutor, even before the indictment is raised. Because the report was presented at this early stage, the prosecutor and judge were able to assess that the two ladies who committed theft did so very much as

a one-time offence and they were unlikely to re-offend. This was reflected in the sanctions imposed, and was a victory for whole system – in my opinion.

*What do you hope to see as the next steps?*

I think without a risk assessment instrument and without pre-sentence reporting, we cannot influence & change behaviours. House arrest, as a major and the most frequently imposed sanction (other than prison) gives very limited results. The root of the problem is that, generally, the judicial authorities do not see the safer community as the end of the story. So the strategy when it comes to alternative sanction is to reduce the prison population, which is fair enough, but not just with one sanction that has a 50-70 % rate of re-offending.

What I would hope to see come out of the pilot is scape up versions of this in other cities around Serbia. In this way, pre-trial and pre-sentencing reports would be recognized as beneficial for criminal justice system, for offenders and adequate sanctions to be imposed, and enforced afterwards, but ultimately also for the positioning of the commissioner service within the criminal justice chain: to be recognised as an equal partner within the judicial chain.

Finally, it is about changing mindsets. Safer communities are the end road for effective alternative sanctions, not just a reduction in prison population, and this must be the focus of our story.



*Above: Frans Clobus during a training on risk assessment.*

*“Finally, it is about changing mindsets. Safer communities are the end road for effective alternative sanctions, not just a reduction in prison population, and this must be the focus of our story.”*

*Marija Petrovic*

## 2021 Programme Highlights

This year the Criminal Justice Programme worked on **8 projects** throughout Europe, aimed at the development of probation, alternative sanctions, and prison reform.

In Probation, we currently we have **three active projects** in the field, one in **Serbia and Montenegro** (built on the previous successful Montenegro project), one in **Ukraine** and one in **Armenia**. Our work aims at supporting the introduction of alternative sanctions to ultimately not only have less crowded correctional facilities and better efficiency in use of public resources, but most importantly **safer and more just communities as a whole**; where **re-offending is low and reconciliation is encouraged**. NHC's probation projects focus on **peer-to-peer training and exchange, institutional support and capacity building and enhancement**. We have also at times helped with developing social media and advocacy strategies to **build public support and awareness of alternative sanctions**. At every step of the way, we are inspired by the international standards in prison and probation, like the European Rules in prison and probation of the Council of Europe and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners, which have a direct relation (articles 58–61) to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In 2021, we reached an important milestone with the acceptance of our jointly produced communications and PR strategy for the further roll out of probation services in Ukraine. The project as a whole aims to further develop the capacities of the Ukrainian Probation Service. As Marija discussed, in Serbia we focused on the roll out and adoption of pre-trial reporting and the risk taxation instrument in the probation system, primarily through the Novi Sad pilot. We also worked together with partners in Serbia to develop a marketing plan for probation, in line with the work we have been doing in Ukraine. Finally, along with the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU), the Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC) and the Confederation of European Probation (CEP), we developed a brochure entitled 'Probation. Why and How,' envisaged both as an impassioned case for the introduction of probation and a how-to guide to its establishment.

In Prison reform, we currently have **5 projects**, focused on shifting away from punitive and **towards rehabilitative systems** in criminal justice. This often requires a change in the core priority of criminal justice systems in the countries where we work. This change process is profound and touches upon many aspects and upon many actors in the criminal justice system. **Hence our projects do not only support capacity building processes within the prison service, but also throughout the criminal justice chain.** It strongly promotes intensive **collaboration**

between the different justice chain actors, which further ensures reforms that are made are sustainable and fully integrated throughout the system. On a practical level, we provides **peer-to-peer trainings, capacity enhancement and strategic institutional support** through the transfer of knowledge and skills. The prison reform projects focus on compliance with European and International standards in criminal justice and human rights, **improving the prison climate**, and introducing working methods to **increase chances for the successful reintegration** of prisoners.

Our 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, while this year we were also able to provide several trainings (of trainers) in person. We restarted training for penitentiary staff in North Macedonia, conducted a regional meeting on the structural and strategic development of penitentiary staff, and were able to conduct a hybrid training for staff members of correctional facilities for juveniles in Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania.

The EPTA project allowed for further professionalization of the EPTA network. The EPTA I project report came out, highlighting outputs such as a highly valued website. The growth in membership was especially impressive, as the number of EPTA members had grown to 32 training academies in 30 countries of the Council of Europe in just 10 years. The NHC's involvement with the EPTA network will continue under the EPTA II project.

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 focuses here 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. As part of this project, we were able to reflect on several success stories in partnership with local NGOs in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova.



## 2021 Programme Overview



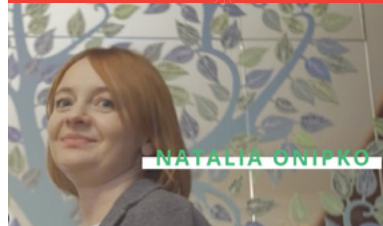
Left: EPTA conference. Middle: COVID-19 project study visit in Moldova. Right: CEP Conference in Prague, October 2021, presentation by Imants Mozers, Koen Goei and Jochum Wildeman on building up probation.



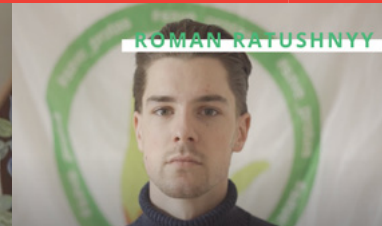
## Human Rights Defence Programme

**W**e 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.

# #FREEVIASNA



NATALIA ONIPRO



ROMAN RATUSHNYI



SERHIY PYSUN



NATALIA SHYBATEVA



SVITLANA VOVK



VALERY KHARCHUK

*Above: Campaign supporting the release of Viasna Human rights organisation members.*

*Left: 'Ukraine Stories' – 6 stills from a collection of short YouTube movies.*

## Feature Interview with Lyudmyla Yankina, Project Leader at ZMINA Human Rights Centre Ukraine

### *Human rights activism in Ukraine*

Please note that since conducting this interview, the situation in Ukraine has changed dramatically, following Russia's invasion of the country. We are in continued close contact with our partners on the ground and will continue to support them in any way that we can. We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and our colleagues and friends who continue their human rights and humanitarian work in these harsh circumstances. We regard their struggle with great concern, and we are inspired by their commitment and resilience.

As part of the NHC's project on Monitoring of Persecution of Human Rights Defenders and Anti-corruption Activists in Ukraine; we sat down with ZMINA Human Rights Centre project coordinator Lyudmila Yankina to discuss the interplay between human rights, (anti) corruption and the rule of law, as well as personal and professional takeaways from the project.

*What can you tell us about the evolution of ZMINA and your own engagement in human rights?*

I did not plan to be a human rights defender at all, as for many in Ukraine it happened during the revolution. I spent years in business, but as someone coming from a poor region of Ukraine, I understood very well what it meant to make it on your own. And I guess I wanted to give back. First I became a volunteer, bringing coffee, tea or some

food for the needy, trying along the way to understand the infrastructure of the revolution. Joining ZMINA, we started to focus on providing more measures for the protection of Human Rights Defenders, through law enforcement and better communication with the state.

*Specifically in terms of human rights, do you see any positive changes?*

In terms of societal changes, yes, our society has become more tolerant, more accepting of communities such as the LGBTIQ+ one. Our police came to be more tolerant. Before the revolution, the police refused to give protection for Pride marches, and every year since those times we see huge progress in their work. And we have a very powerful human rights movement, covering issues from illegal developers, to LGBTIQ+ rights, the environmental,



Above: Lyudmyla Yankina. Project Leader ZMINA Human Rights Center.

*“We have so many inspiring meetings with team members from the NHC, where every hour of the meeting was informative, interesting. I feel that there is this emotional involvement, that the NHC is invested, as you say in Ukrainian, with the heart.”*

Lyudmila Yankina

For more on the current work of Lyudmila, ZMINA and our partners from Ukraine: NHC: [Article on Ukrainian civil society](#). NHC: [Article on Women Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine](#). Irish Times: [Newspaper article](#).

women's rights, to name just a few. Through our monitoring, we can see how many persecutions are taking place in each group, but also just how huge of a movement we are right now. Ironically, part of the reason our human rights defenders (movement) has come under threat is because they have been so successful in their activities. And while donors gave a lot of resources to empower anti-corruption activists, they didn't always provide the necessary protection, so their success very often resulted in increased threats to their person, and the movement as a whole.

*The NHC and ZMINA have cooperated on the project Monitoring of Persecution of Human Rights Defenders and Anti-corruption Activists in Ukraine, in order to stimulate public demand for defence of human rights, helping to remove obstacles for independent civil society and the Ukrainian society as a whole. Can you tell us about this cooperation?*

We both understood the importance of monitoring, and at the start, this was the sole focus, with very little advocacy. And I will be honest, it was horrible. At the time I myself was a monitor, I was documenting these cases. And why was it horrible? With focus solely on monitoring and documentation, I felt useless, as if I only took information and I didn't give anything in return. With this project, and the help of the NHC, we started to have opportunities to provide comprehensive help. If a person came to us with a case,

not only can we now monitor and document the case, we can also provide legal aid, we can provide physical protection, even national and international advocacy. So many things, it is a package right now and during the creation of this package, every new case empowered the system. Every time a difficult case arrives, I now think of all the different ways in which we can help. The role of the NHC in amplifying their voices and providing international advocacy is very important. When the issue is broadcasted internationally, you know someone outside is watching. And so law enforcement and ministries started to speak differently to us, they pay attention to our points. Now they are paying attention.

*What has been the most inspiring part of this cooperation for you?*

How we worked as a team, how we create common decisions and ideas. We have so many inspiring meetings with team members from the NHC, where every hour of the meeting was informative, interesting. I feel that there is this emotional involvement, that the NHC is invested, as you say in Ukrainian, with the heart. And I know your team is diverse, and so I felt you really understood our situation - you know the level of threats we face, and the mentality of post-soviet authoritarian regimes. You have a sense for the context. I like that for the team of NHC, for every person, it was not just a job. It was something you value and work with pride.

*“Our partnership with the NHC is very important to us, as the NHC takes care of the international advocacy, and when the issue is broadcasted internationally, we know that the international community is watching us. As a result, the government has started to speak differently to us, they now pay attention to our points and there is a dialogue. Before it was a monologue, if we raised an issue that they did not like they ignored us. Now they are paying attention”*

*Lyudmila Yankina*

## 2021 Programme Highlights

In 2021, the NHC's the Human Rights Defence Programme continued its work to spread crucial messages on our **fundamental freedoms** in order to increase support for human rights—and for those that defend them—so that work towards positive change in society can continue and contribute to a more peaceful and just world.

How we continued to do this in 2021:

- By ensuring **informed understanding of and attention to** these fundamental freedoms and the need for the rule of law, through **targeted human rights communications campaigns**; for example through our [#BringHumanRightsHome](#) campaign. Through this campaign, the NHC in partnership with human rights organisations from across Europe shared the personal stories of courageous people from eight different countries whose rights were severely violated. Hailing from **Azerbaijan, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Netherlands**, they overcame opposition in court, personal threats, and financial hardship; stood up to actors much more powerful than themselves – yet never gave up. With the support of friends, family, and communities, they reclaimed their rights – for themselves, and ultimately, for us all. Their stories stand as a powerful reminder that **we can all stand up for human rights**. The campaign and storytelling videos generated more than 2 million views via social media and the [events](#) held.

- By contributing to the **resilience of civil society** to engage on the topic of human rights. One of the ways in which we continued to do so was through [Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe \(RARE\)](#). This network was designed to respond to ever-growing threats to the EU's foundations of high democratic standards and human rights protection. RARE brings together leading European human rights defenders in a two-year capacity- and alliance-building programme centered around closely monitoring and advocating against possible infringements of these foundational principles of the Union. RARE also aims to build awareness that **“an attack against one civic organization operating in one jurisdiction is a threat against all others too”**.

In order to counteract the increasingly challenging national operating contexts within the borders of the EU, human rights NGOs need to become engaged advocates vis à vis their governments, as well as towards other European countries and multilateral organizations. The groundwork for mobilizing the necessary skills and resources to meet these goals will

be laid over the course of nine networking and capacity-building camps in different European cities. Not only will this enhance the visibility of the various organizations in the international public sphere, but it builds a dedicated community for joint advocacy campaigns and lobbying. As part of the RARE programme, in September 2021 we facilitated a meeting between representatives of Dutch ministries and RARE participants, with a discussion focused on the [state of the rule of law in the EU](#).

- By **bringing attention to, and support, human rights and human rights defenders (HRDs)**, particularly in countries **where human rights are being challenged** and the space for civil society is being curtailed. We continued to do so through, among others, our partnership with ZMINA Human Rights Centre in Ukraine, working together on “Increasing the Role and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine”. **This project aims to stimulate public demand for defence of human rights in Ukraine, which will help to remove obstacles for independent civil society and the Ukrainian society as a whole**. One of the ways of doing so is by producing quarterly and [annual reports](#) that provide full and up-to-date information about the pressure and risks human rights defenders and anti-corruption activists face. These reports are created to inform representatives of the government, media, international missions, partner organizations, and the general public. We also launched a joint campaign centred around 8 storytelling videos, which highlight the [personal stories and experiences of six activists](#) working to defend human rights for all in Ukraine, in spite of the increasingly difficult circumstances. We finalized our compelling storytelling campaign **Stories that need to be heard** with with the [production of a publication](#) featuring the personal stories and experiences of 20 activists working to ensure human rights in the country.

- By **advocating for progressive policy responses** by states and regional organisations to **mainstream human rights** into their relations with other states. We continued to raise awareness on the situation in **Belarus**, calling for a stronger response from the international community, and standing in solidarity with the people of Belarus and the local human rights organisation who faced wave after wave of repression. 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, for instance through our participation in the [2021 Fundamental Rights Forum](#), and contribution to the [first high-level conference on Rule of Law in Europe](#) in Portugal.



## 2021 Programme Overview



*Left: 'Suspect to Begin With,' event on the Dutch story of our Bring Human Rights Home campaign, and campaign poster for the Hungarian story. Find out more: <https://www.nhc.nl/programmes/human-rights-defence/bring-human-rights-home>. Centre right: Training in Ukraine as part of Capacity Building project. Far right: Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe (RARE) team members.*



## Integrity and Accountability Programme

**W**e 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 mindset 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: The Rule of Law Training (RoLT) Alumni Days in June and December for former RoLT programme participants.

Left: Democracy and Governance Practise Retreat 2021.

## Feature Interview with Eugeniu Ciubotaru, RoLT participant and judge from the Republic of Moldova

### *The MaTra Rule of Law Training Programme*

**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, training programmes introduce civil servants to best practices in a wide range of rule of law themes. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent travel bans, the trainings were fully re-designed into five week online courses for each topic.**

Eugeniu Ciubotaru has been a judge in the Republic of Moldova for the last four years, specialising in civil cases and family economics. He had attended the Rule of Law training on Administration of Justice in 2020. Later in 2021, he attended a newly designed programme for RoLT alumni, focusing on leadership skills.

*What was your motivation originally to apply for the Rule of Law training Programme?*

The authorities in my country do not bother with trainings to improve our skills. However, I am always looking to be better and to do things that are not really about my job and make

me a better person. Another interesting thing for me was when I saw the list of participants from the nine countries of that are not part of EU, I knew for sure that we have the same troubles, challenges and that it will be very interesting to be together and to start to learn new things from each other.

*How did you find the Leadership course?*

Frankly speaking, I did not expect too much new information and as the course was online, I thought it would be a little bit boring, but I couldn't have been more wrong. I really enjoyed the course a lot I could not wait for the new sessions and all the trainers were incredibly professional. I made many notes and I wrote many things that I want to implement immediately. I also want to say that my colleagues in the training were very dedicated and very interactive. It was amazing and I am not just saying this for the interview, I relayed everything I learnt with my team, colleagues and friends. I really enjoyed the Netherlands and looking at your systems, and I want to gain a deeper understanding of why some things work better in your system, and what we can do to adopt this in our home countries.



*Above: Eugeniu Ciubotaru, Judge, Republic of Moldova.*

*“I really enjoyed the course a lot I could not wait for the new sessions and all the trainers were incredibly professional. I made many notes and I wrote many things that I want to implement immediately.”*

*Eugeniu Ciubotaru*

*Thoughts on current state of RoLT in Moldova, most pressing issues that need to be addressed?*

Historically in my country, there has been little confidence in the justice system. There is a sense that politicians are always trying to control the justice system, because we are very small country and if you control the justice system you can control the political issues. It can be really deflating that, even though about 90% of the our judges work with integrity, there are also people in high positions that have close ties with politicians, which results in the fact that a lot of society does not value our work. That is why I am working as a judge and am trying to improve things that I know are not correct. But to succeed we really need leadership skills and virtues. The course really helped me with that.

It is also very important to mention that in our justice system we are still pushing for many reforms, and yet we are still waiting on results. We now have 30 years of independence, and we are still waiting for great things, waiting with great patience, but very little has happened. I think that now is the chance to implement reforms because we have new government that is very pro-European and they are pushing the justice system a lot. I think future reforms will be a good chance for us to start with a clean slate and to start to do things correctly.

*Biggest take away from the Leadership course?*

There were many takeaways but here are three: How to avoid conflicts, there are many conflicts in society and they are not helpful so it is good to learn how to prevent conflict; how to motivate and encourage my team members at the right moment; and how to think outside the box. I took away many new skills from the course and I have been busy implementing what I have learnt into my own work. I understood that it is not necessary to introduce complicated methods but we have started to have more feedback moments with the team and the work is now going a lot easier.

**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@nhc.nl](mailto:matrarolt@nhc.nl).**

*“I took away many new skills from the course and I have been busy implementing what I have learnt into my own work. I understood that it is not necessary to introduce complicated methods but we have started to have more feedback moments with the team and the work is now going a lot easier.”*

Eugeniu Ciubotaru



## 2021 Programme Highlights

In 2021, we continued working towards an in-country **systemic-level shift in mentality** and attitudes towards integrity and accountability. Whereby these concepts are not mere pro-forma checkboxes that have to be ticked, but **seen as a fundamental part of the rule of law** – and protected as such. Specifically, we are working on:

**Increasing dialogue and collaboration** between law enforcement, public service, civil society and media within and between target countries. We did do also through our (online) Rule of Law trainings, alumni days and Leadership course. In 2021, we held 3 online course on Detention and Alternative Sanctions, Freedom of the Media, and Public Finance and Procurement. 2019/2020 Alumni were brought together for Virtual Alumni events in June and December, where reflections were made on the course, the Bring Home Action Plans and their implementation thus far, as well as the road forward. All Dutch Embassies in the beneficiary countries joined in. We were very happy to learn course participants felt the programme had ‘significantly affected their professional development’ and that the MaTra ROLT programme had contributed to ‘results generated by the team’. You can learn more on reflections by several RoLT alumni in this article.

**Improving the understanding and awareness** of fundamental aspects of the rule of law. As part of our continued efforts, in June of 2021 we held a session entitled ‘Building back better: Getting ahead on the rule of law’, as part of the inaugural Democracy Retreat, which we joined as an organising partner. The session focussed on exploring ways to monitor, prevent and sanction corruption practices that affect Rule of Law mechanisms in place, with the aim to develop new ways for parliaments, civil society and the media to support and safeguard ‘building back better’ through the ‘Recovery Plan for Europe’. The session was aimed at civil servants of the European Institutions and its member states. The keynote speaker in this event was Committee member Kathleen Ferrier. A number of MEPs and representatives from civil society and the media also had prepared interventions. The session had one of the largest audience of the retreat. The NHC also became a member of the UNCAC coalition, working as part of a global networking on anti-corruption issues and raising awareness for (anti)corruption as a fundamental rule of law and human rights issue. In June 2021, we also organised a series of Q&A with Hungarian academics on rule of law backsliding in Hungary.

**Advocating for more proactive rule of law support** amongst all sectors of government, both in target countries, the Netherlands and beyond. One of the ways we continued to do so was through our Trans-border corruption project and resulting report, where we focused on the

question of why, in so few cases, prosecution or other legal steps have been initiated in the EU and other western countries against those engaging in or enabling corruption, or those moving around or investing the resulting sums of money. The study centred on case studies & indications of how companies and individuals from Russia and EU member states were involved in forms of corruption. The report was launched a webinar with members of the European Parliament. Under the Strengthening Media Freedom programme, talks were held with project partners in both the Netherlands (FPU, SSR, OM) as well as in the beneficiary countries. We are currently focusing on our attention on the enablers of corruption within the EU.

**Contributing to enabling an environment where freedom of expression** is upheld by focusing on enhancing the competencies of law enforcement, judicial authorities and journalists in Serbia, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We see that the judiciary is largely incapable to respond with appropriate measures against attacks on journalists and independent media, adding to a further pressure on an already weak rule of law. By emphasizing that both journalist and the judiciary share similar goals and play an equally important role as defenders of the rule of law, and ultimately as defenders of democracy and citizen rights, we focus on improving the cooperation between the two groups. We concentrate on the best practices related to enabling freedom of expression and creating a meaningful exchange between the judicial authorities and journalists associations. By doing this, we contribute to a more effective follow-up by the relevant institutions to threats and violence against journalists. We do this by organizing online and in person partner meetings and by exchanging best practices from the Netherlands, in order to rebuild the relationship and trust between the two groups in the three target countries.

We once again contributed to the Rule of Law report on the Netherlands, highlighting in particular the need for increased transparency when it comes to political lobbying in the Netherlands, as well as enforcement of judicial prosecution for foreign perpetrators of (bribery) crimes under employment/instruction of Dutch companies. Consequently, we welcomed the discussion on EU Rule of Law in Dutch Parliament.

We continued to hold advocacy meetings were on the rule of law within the EU, most notably with the Cabinet of Commissioner Jourova, MPs from the European Affairs Committee and the Dutch Ministries of Justice and Security and Foreign Affairs, and joined other CSOs around Europe in raising awareness and calling for attention to rule of law backsliding and steps that can and should be taken on a local as well as European level.

## 2021 Programme Overview



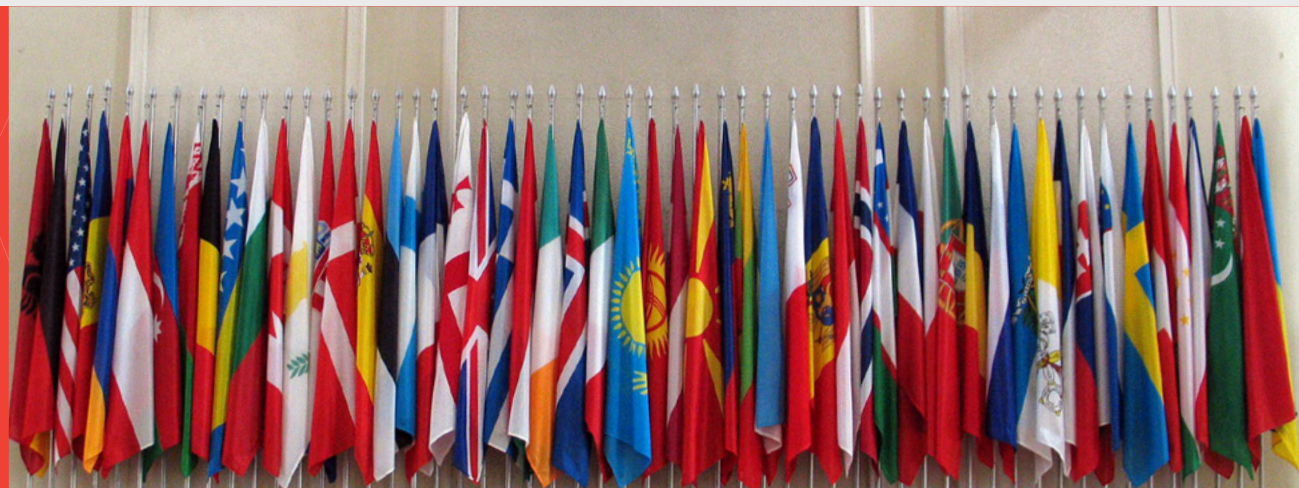
*Left: Tackling Russian Elite's Corruption: Mission Impossible? Centre: Media Freedom conference October 2021 in Prague. Right: The Rule of Law Training (RoLT) Alumni Days in June and December for former RoLT programme participants.*



## 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.



osce

31st

Volume of the Journal  
Security and Human Rights  
published

47

News, analysis  
and opinion pieces  
published

113k

Page Views  
(50% increase  
from 2020)



SECURITY AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
MONITOR

Creation of self  
hosted fully open  
access Journal archive  
and publication,  
pending full launch

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

2021 Analysis

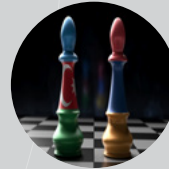


As New OSCE Chair, Sweden Faces a Complex Security Situation

**Lars-Erik Lundin**

SIPRI Distinguished Associate Fellow and member of the board of the Swedish OSCE NGO Network

*Left: Ann Linde, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2021.  
Photo: OSCE/MFA Sweden*



What role for the OSCE in Nagorno-Karabakh?

**Wolfgang Sporrer**

Fellow for International Conflict Management at the Hertie School & former Head of the Human Dimension at the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

**Bernhard Knoll-Tudor**

Director of Executive Education at the Hertie School & former policy design at the OSCE.

*Photo: Rawf8/Shutterstock*



China: A Challenge or an Opportunity for the OSCE?

**Stefan Wolff**

Professor of International Security at the University of Birmingham & principle author of the OSCE Network report “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for the OSCE”.

*Photo: I.M. Sanchez/Shutterstock/Alamy*



To stay or not to stay? Seven concerns Russia has about the OSCE

**Andrey Kortunov**

Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

*Left: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.  
Photo: OSCE/Susanna Lööf*



Russia blocks holding of OSCE human rights conference, diplomats say

**Stephanie Lichtenstein**

Editor in Chief SHRM

*Left: Past OSCE human rights conference  
Photo: OSCE/Piotr Markowski*



Sweden’s bumpy six months at the helm of the OSCE

**Stephanie Lichtenstein**

Editor in Chief SHRM

*Left: Ann Linde, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2021.  
Photo: OSCE/MFA Sweden*



Guarding the guardians: Reforming Ukraine’s security service

**Fredrik Wesslau**

Deputy Head of the European Union Advisory Mission to Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine)

*Left: 25th anniversary of the SBU.  
Photo: Shutterstock/Drop of Light*



35 OSCE States ‘Reject Firmly’ Belarus’ Claims on Human Rights Situation

**Stephanie Lichtenstein**

Editor in Chief SHRM

*Photo: PVLGT/shutterstock*



Sweden’s OSCE Chairpersonship: ‘Tactical mistakes’ amid tense geopolitical situation and ongoing pandemic

**Stephanie Lichtenstein**

Editor in Chief SHRM

*Left: Ann Linde, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Sweden’s, Minister for Foreign Affairs, on an official visit to Ukraine, 2021.  
Photo: OSCE/Evgeniy Maloletka*



## 2021 Interviews



*Stop micromanaging the Secretary General' Thomas Greminger on his past three years in office*

**Thomas Greminger**  
Ambassador and Former OSCE Secretary General

*Left: Thomas Greminger.  
Photo: OSCE*



*If we want to defend Europe's interests, we have to engage with Russia*

**Ambassador Pierre Vimont**  
Executive Secretary General of the European External Action Service

*Left: Pierre Vimont. Photo: Frédéric Remouchamps /Keops, Friends of Europe, Flickr*



*UN human rights official: Civilians in eastern Ukraine 'want peace'*

**Matilda Bogner**  
Head of UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine

*Left: Matilda Bogner.  
Photo: UN Ukraine*



*I want to create informal channels of dialogue'*

**Helga Schmid**  
OSCE Secretary General

*Left: Helga Maria.  
Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell*

## 2021 Opinion



*How to rescue the OSCE human dimension*

**Harry Hummel**  
NHC Senior Policy Advisor

*Photo: OSCE/Maria Kuchma*



*Killing it – not so softly? Human rights accountability and political will in the OSCE*

**Christian Strohal**  
Retired Austrian career diplomat and former Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

*Left: The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 2018, Warsaw. Photo: OSCE/Piotr Dziubak*

## 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)

[Tamara Trotman](#)

[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](#) (until December 2021)

Piet de Klerk & Marjolijn van Oordt

(ad interim December 2021-February 2022)

[Kirsten Meijer](#) (since February 2022)

**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](#)

[Brianna McGonigle Leyh](#)

[Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen](#)

[Jaap de Zwaan](#) (until December 2021)

[Kathleen Ferrier](#)

[Kitty Nooy](#)

[Lodewijk \(Lo\) Casteleijn](#)

[Maria Anne van Dijk](#)

[Marijke van Veen](#)

[Marit Maj](#)

[Max Bader](#) (until December 2021)

[Quirine Eijkman](#) (until December 2021)

[Rick Lawson](#) (until December 2021)

[Sjef van Gennip](#)

[Takvor Avedissian](#) (until December 2021)

*Above: NHC Supervisory Board, Board, and Committee Members, 2019. Photo by [Allard Willemse Photography](#).*

## NHC Funding Partners

With thanks to our funding partners for their continued trust and for making our mission of strengthening the rule of law, safe-guarding human rights and building the capacity of civil society possible.



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