RECLAIMING AND RESHAPING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE FOR ACTION ON COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY IN THE NEW AND EVOLVING GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Report on the proceedings of the expert seminar in the framework of the Helsinki+50 project organised by the Civic Solidarity Platform

3 May 2025, Vienna

The seminar was held on 3 May 2025 in Vienna in the framework of the "Helsinki+50 initiative towards the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act: Reflection process on the future of the OSCE in the times of crises" project, implemented by the Civic Solidarity Platform with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the OSCE.

The seminar brought together 22 experts, including independent consultants and members from the following organisations, many of whom combine analytical and academic expertise in the field of human rights and security as well as activist background and strong knowledge of the work of the OSCE and other inter-governmental organisations: Araminta (Germany), Austausch (Germany), Austrian Helsinki Association (Austria), Austrian Institute of International Affairs (Austria), Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine), Centre for Solidarity International (Lithuania), Crude Accountability (USA), Freedom Files (Poland), George Washington University (USA), Historians without Borders (Finland), Human Rights Defence Centre "Memorial" (international/Russia), International Federation for Human Rights (international), International Partnership for Human Rights (international), International Strategic Action Network for Security – iSANS (Poland), Libereco (The Netherlands), Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia), Netherlands Helsinki Committee (the Netherlands), Public Verdict Foundation (Russia), Swiss Helsinki Committee (Switzerland), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Germany).

The seminar programme included several sessions: introduction of the Helsinki+50 project, seminar goals, and introduction of the participants (opening session); taking stock of the new geopolitical environment and its impact on civic space (session 1); reflecting on objectives, new approaches and modes of civil society work beyond the current models (session 2); broadening and deepening civil society engagement on comprehensive security (session 3); conclusions and brainstorming on recommendations to the OSCE and other actors and discussion of the planned documents (session 4). Sessions 1, 2, and 3 started with introductory remarks by experts, followed by a discussion.

The report applies Chatham House rules, meaning that neither the identity nor the affiliation of the experts who delivered introductory remarks and the participants in the discussions are revealed in referring to statements made at the seminar, except those speakers who agreed to have their names and affiliations indicated.

The first session of the seminar was dedicated to the impact on civil society of the new hostile geopolitical environment, including the U.S. administration policies. The goal of the session was to look into big picture issues and their impact: shifting alignment and priorities of the U.S., rise of the right in Europe, continued aggression against Ukraine and discussions about possible peace arrangements, increasing emphasis of European states on military defence and security, limited adherence to international law including human rights law, etc. The discussion also addressed the question of what the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) and related civil society organisations see as their principal approaches in the new and evolving geopolitical environment

In her introductory remarks, Kate Watters (Crude Accountability) spoke about the impact of the Trump administration policies on civil society and human rights in the United States. She stated that during the first hundred days of the second Trump administration, it became clear that it looks more like a regime than an administration. She observed that there appears to be an overarching effort by the president and his cabinet to strengthen the executive branch of government at the expense of the independence and equal authority of the legislative and judicial branches. The judicial branch, including the Supreme Court, is under intense pressure from this administration to toe the Trump line, and there are numerous instances in which the regime simply ignores legal rulings. At least one judge has found the administration in criminal contempt of court, and it remains to be seen what will happen if Trump ignores this ruling as well. The legislative branch at the federal level appears to be willingly ceding its authority to the executive branch. With a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate, there is little that the Democrats can do. Although it has to be said that with a few notable exceptions, the Democrats are failing to call out adequately the Trump administration on its horrific actions.

There is an all-out assault on U.S. government and society, and there is not a portion of the culture that has not been impacted by what is happening. The administration has made it clear that its goal is to undermine and undo the work to build a broader, more inclusive, and engaged society. Their actions are telling us exactly where they want to go and what they are willing to do to get there.

Turning to a number of issues that are most relevant in the context of the seminar, Kate first referred to the gutting of the government budget and government staffing, including funding for foreign assistance, diplomacy, human rights work, humanitarian aid, and much more. According to media reports, administration proposes an 84% cut to the State Department. The cuts include more than $8,300,000,000 for what they call “radical leftist priorities”. Those include climate change, DEI, and LGBTQ+ issues. The cuts also take aim at U.S. support for international institutions, including the UN and the WHO, and $690,000,000 is cut from educational and cultural exchange. They will probably not get this entire budget through both chambers of the Congress, but this is what they are proposing. So, it is very important to keep in mind where their priorities are. The budget proposal also cuts the Environmental Protection Agency by 54.5%, including $100,000,000 to the Environmental Justice Program. The Environmental Protection Agency has historically provided environmental justice funding to nonprofit organisations inside the U.S. working in fenceline communities, which are disproportionately impacted by industrial activity, including oil and gas production. That funding is currently completely frozen. Kate stressed that it is Congress, not the executive branch of the government, that is responsible for the U.S. budget. Congress allocates money and determines who gets funding. So, what the executive branch is doing is illegal.

The Trump administration has viciously attacked universities, denying government funding, attempting to dictate curricula, and limiting protest rights of students on campuses. Many of the students who have been detained, including "immigrants" who have been detained and deported, have been simply exercising their first amendment rights on campus. The Trump administration has withheld funding when universities do not comply with its orders. In this context, Kate gave the example of Harvard University, which refused to knuckle when the administration threatened its funding, which was then subsequently withheld. Simultaneously, the administration has also stopped a programme of loan forgiveness for students, which had been put in place during the pandemic. Overall, the proposed budget includes a 15.3% cut to the public education system in the United States. This is accompanied by attacks on libraries, including community libraries, which are under threat primarily from Christian right-wing groups opposed to some library content, stating that it is LGBTQ+ propaganda.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Homeland Security have apprehended, arbitrarily detained, and deported without due process thousands of people in the last four months. Some of them, including 200 Venezuelans who were taken to a prison in El Salvador without due process, have been forcibly disappeared. The disappearance numbers are not publicly available, but some claim that there are over a thousand forced disappearances in the United States since Donald Trump took office. Just by comparison, there were 162 disappeared persons in Turkmenistan for the last 20 years. Groups that work on advocacy and legal support for minorities and immigrants are also under pressure from the administration, and at the same time, the administration proposes a 65% increase for Homeland Security. It is one of the few areas of increase in the budget.

Civil society organisations are concerned that their 501(c)3 status (the federal determination that defines tax exemption for non-profit organisations) may be revoked. Workshops and online trainings for non-profits have been organised by other nonprofits on how to deal with this if it happens and to help NGOs understand what could happen to them if their status is taken away.

In early March, Trump fired the board of directors of the Kennedy Center, the nation's premier cultural centre, installed himself as chair of the board, and filled the board with his own people. He fired the executive director of the Kennedy Center and installed a loyalist. Trump had never set foot in the Kennedy Center before this. He said publicly that his reasons for making such significant changes were because the Kennedy Center "is too woke".

The knowledge, expertise, experience, and understanding of what is required to run a government is absolutely missing from this administration. They don't know what they don't know, which makes them all the more dangerous. The resistance is growing in the United States, but in the short term, we are in an extremely precarious place. If we do not get together soon, we are at risk of losing our democracy. Many civil society organisations in the U.S. are like a deer in the headlights, although that is changing. The experience of the Civic Solidarity Platform and its members that have been working for a long time in repressive regimes is really needed by American NGOs now.

Kate listed several areas where NGOs in the U.S. need help. First, they need to understand that capitulating as a first response is not the answer. The example of Columbia University, which gave in when the Trump administration came after them and lost their funding anyway but also lost their credibility, demonstrates that. Harvard, when Trump came after them, said no. They are suing.

Another example is the National Endowment for Democracy. When its funding was frozen, it sued the government and their money was unfrozen within a week. So, fighting back is important, and more organisations in the U.S. need to understand that.

Secondly, American organisations are underprepared when it comes to personal and digital security. This is a new area for U.S. civil society, and many groups are experiencing a big learning curve. There was some knowledge and some work on this during the Black Lives Matter movement, but it was not as broad as it needs to be. We need to talk about different kinds of protection, what new models of organisations need to look like, what banking protections could be put in place, and also how to better cultivate solidarity among ourselves, identify new donors, not just for money, but for solidarity and for reaching out to a community, and new ways of thinking about what it means to be civically engaged across sectors.

Answering questions about solidarity and opposition to the Trump administration, Kate noted that day by day, Americans are understanding that solidarity is important. She mentioned many conversations she has had about the Trump administration actions and how they are affecting domestic non-profit organisations, universities, libraries, high schools, and ordinary citizens. There is this big kind of learning curve happening with people, and the ripple effect is starting to be felt, she noted.

Speaking about the opposition on the national level, Kate referred to some specific examples of members of the Democratic Party who have been very outspoken. Both Commonwealth of Virginia senators have filed motions and are active on social media, which is not the case for many elected officials who are not familiar with the medium. This is really important because it serves as a way to reach out to younger voters, and a large portion of the youth population did not vote in the last federal elections because they did not think that they were being heard, and they probably were not. Kate also referred to Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, who have been on an anti-oligarchy campaign throughout the country, drawing tens and hundreds of thousands of people to their rallies. At the state level, the governor of Maine pushed back against President Trump when he said that she was violating federal laws by allowing trans-women to compete in women's sports. He said to her, "We are the law", and she replied, "I'll see you in court".

In terms of nonpartisan resistance, it is important to remember that there are a lot of civil society organisations in the United States. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), for example, has filed numerous lawsuits on behalf of labour groups, migrant groups, women's groups, LGBTQI+ groups, student groups and others. Hundreds of lawsuits are in the court system right now.

The legal response in the court systems to Trump has been quite strong at all levels, and the Supreme Court is being forced to take up a lot of these cases. The current Supreme Court is considered to be conservative, but in some instances the Supreme Court has pushed back against Trump's push for extreme executive authority. Commenting on the application of the 1789 Illegal Aliens Act that was used by the administration for removing immigrants, Kate noted that the courts found that its use is illegal.

Responding to a question about a position of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Kate said she was not aware of anything concrete that the Commission is doing now with regard to the administration although some members have been outspoken on specific issues.

On the international level, Kate noted, there was a critical Universal Periodic Review filing this year in respect of the United States on a multitude of issues, which will be reviewed at the November session of the Human Rights Council.

As for the layoffs in the non-profit sector due to massive funding cuts, they are large, and many organisations have been permanently impacted. Freedom House lost 95% of its funding; National Democratic Institution (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) have lost the lion's share of their funding. There are concerns that groups like the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) and others responsible for international educational programs and fellowships are also losing their money. National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has had massive layoffs. The International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL) and similar organisations have lost major funding.

Commenting on the observation about the resemblance of the developments in many authoritarian countries as regards the government policy towards civil society and, in particular, when regimes there first go after tax status or financial status and then switch to a political move, Kate agreed with that assessment and said that the Trump regime is moving quickly in that direction. When you have language such as "acting not in the interest of the U.S. government", how much broader can that get? That can encompass reproductive rights groups, that already encompasses DEI, climate change, LGBTQ+ rights.

The next speaker, Sebastien Peyrouse (George Washington University) spoke about the impact of the Trump administration policies on civil society globally. The administration is significantly reducing American engagement in supporting global civil society development. What we see with the withdrawal of U.S. support for civil society in Central Asia, or what we are going to see in Central Asia, is very likely to be followed with reduction of U.S. programmes in many other authoritarian countries, at least in the Eurasian space, for example, in Azerbaijan or Russia, Sebastien claimed, based on his experience with three distinct projects on U.S. engagement with civil society that he has been involved in.

Sebastien's first point was that civil society activists in Central Asia had already had serious concerns about U.S. support prior to this administration's policy and funding changes. These concerns have been greatly augmented since Trump came back. Before that, the U.S. has been actively supporting civil society organisations working in such areas as economic and social development, education, health care, prevention of extremism or non-discrimination. Local activists were really welcoming U.S. efforts, encouraging the U.S. to go further, especially on such issues as inter-ethnic relations or gender inequality. A huge majority of civil society activists were telling Sebastien that U.S. funders, despite their stated goals, were not doing enough to support the development of a free civil society. A major concern, raised by majority of the organisations was that over the past two decades, the U.S. donors have engaged in self-censorship, which has resulted in a retreat from programmes that were focusing on democratisation, opposing political repression and authoritarianism. This U.S. approach has failed actually to challenge Central Asian governments' approach which favours apolitical technical aid projects, which in turn reinforce the status quo whereas a few genuinely independent civil society organisations have been pushed to the margins of public life and prevented from participating in the formulation of state policy.

There was a widespread anxiety and concern about what is going to come next now when Trump came back. First, because of Trump's policy to cut funding of civil society in the United States. It is

going to have a huge impact on how the U.S. is funding civil society abroad, including in Central Asia. Activists have complained for years that many foreign donors, including U.S. funders, tend to work with only a very limited number of local partners. Over the past ten years, they have had significantly reduced the number of local organisations they were partnering with. They shifted towards larger consolidated projects which involve smaller groups of trusted foreign and local actors which they see as easier to manage compared to funding multiple smaller initiatives that would require more administrative oversight and staff. Due to the lack of funding, which is likely to worsen now, many organisations have become inactive or are going to become inactive.

Governments in Central Asia are speaking about a flourishing civil society by pointing to the thousands of civil society organisations which are officially registered in this country. Registration, however, does not mean activity. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, only 7,000 out of more than 20,000 registered organisations are actually operational. In Tajikistan in 2024, there were about 2,000 registered organisations but more than half of them were inactive. Many of those which are now active are likely to disappear in the near future due to the lack of funding. Another issue is that inactivity is also a tool for some authoritarian governments to further restrict and control civil society. In Tajikistan, the authorities retain the right to shut down organisations that are inactive for several months.

Sebastien pointed out that Central Asian civil society activists reported that they feel increasingly isolated. They have the feeling they have been forced into a kind of unequal struggle against deepening authoritarianism. Many activists, experts, and even academics are increasingly afraid now to engage in discussions about human rights. Without U.S. support, both financial and political, this sense of isolation is very likely to increase.

The United States used to be one of the most outspoken countries defending civil society and raising cases of repression against human rights organisations. If public statements by the U.S. stop to be made, independent civil society will feel more vulnerable. With U.S. decreasing financial support, civil society is likely to be even more corrupted by political authorities. All the civil society organisations that were interviewed by Sebastien agreed that the overwhelming majority of CSOs in Central Asia are now government funded and/ or controlled by the government, and hence are considered as Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs). In Kazakhstan, for example, at least 70% of CSOs in Astana are funded by the government, and this figure goes above 90% in the regions. In Uzbekistan, more than 70% of CSOs are considered GONGOs, and this percent is likely to increase if U.S. funding stops or decreases which is already happening. This means that organisations will be more controlled by political authorities.

A question is, will the decrease of U.S. interest lead to the increase of engagement by other countries, first of all, of Russia and China? Certainly so. China is being more and more involved in funding of civil society in Central Asia. At the same time, it is unlikely that democratic countries will increase their engagement with civil society. Japan and South Korea, which are very engaged in the region, have consistently stated that they would not be involved in the democratization process. The EU has a very broad agenda with limited funds, and it is unlikely that its engagement in supporting civil society in Central Asia will increase significantly.

Sebastien alleged that changes in U.S. foreign policy and towards the USAID is likely to embolden authorities in the region to increase repression on civil society. CSOs in Central Asia and other

regions may face investigation and harassment based on statements similar to the one by Trump, when he claimed that USAID was run "by radical left lunatics", or Elon Musk, when he claimed that USAID was a criminal organisation that supported terrorists. In March in Kazakhstan, there were some deputies who formally requested the minister of national economy and the minister of justice to conduct an audit of foreign funding of NGOs. According to them, some U.S. funded programs contradicted traditional values. This narrative is really giving authoritarian regimes a pretext to silence organisations.

Sebastien reiterated that civil society activists in Central Asia feel fatigue, disappointment and abandonment. At the same time, he observed a lot of positive reactions from young people willing to be more engaged in civil society work. So, there is some hope. Now, when there is an atmosphere of resentment among the population due to so many social issues, corruption, and authoritarianism in Central Asia, it is the right moment for foreign stakeholders to be more engaged, including in promoting a free civil society and human rights.

Commenting on the question about the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Sebastien said that a lot of activities and initiatives taken by the Helsinki Commission depend on the leadership. Sometimes, you have leaders who are willing to be engaged in some sectors and some regions, and sometimes much less. Right now, the Helsinki Commission is willing to be more involved in Central Asia, which would be a good news, but let's see what happens in the coming months. The same is with the Bureau on Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) at the State Department, for example. It is surviving, but might be very strongly reframed and reduced. It is true that a lot of measures are coming from above. But there are also plenty of people at the State Department who are still willing to be engaged, regardless of decisions of the Trump administration.

With regard to questions on what international organisations could do for civil society in Central Asia, Sebastian noted the OSCE will have a bigger role to play. There is, however, a concern that there is a lack of information at the OSCE and other international organisations about the situation in Central Asia. Another problem is that the OSCE will have to improve the capacity of civil society organisations. On that, the OSCE could do a lot including training local civil society organisations through, for example, online meetings and seminars.

Another potential sphere of work is interaction with the diaspora. For example, Turkmenistan now has between one and two million people residing outside the country. This includes those who work abroad and those who had to flee their country because of repression. Many of them hope for more support, including when they try to create a civil society organisation in exile.

Contributing to the discussion, Kate noted that among American NGOs there is not enough understanding about what the OSCE is, but grassroots groups are very interested in engaging, they just need to understand what the value of the OSCE is. In terms of international organisations more generally, the case of Dakota Access Pipeline proved that native American groups can engage with international institutions very effectively. She also referred to the case of *Roe v. Wade*, where reproductive rights groups reached out to the international community and created a precedent.

Intervention by Andrea Strasser-Camagni (International Partnership for Human Rights) covered the issues of civil society space in South Caucasus and Central Asia. She started by referring to the erosion of the rule-based international order which she considered to be one of the main

developments now, with the key actors like Russia and China, but also the U.S. openly challenging the primacy of international law and human rights law. The U.S. is becoming an unreliable partner. In this regard, Andrea noted an increasing transactional approach to foreign policy, where strategic utility outweighs principled engagement — with serious negative consequences for global human rights protections. Further polarisation of societies goes ahead, increasing poverty and inequality. As a result, there is declining public trust in democratic institutions.

On the political level, there is a rise of the far right not only in Europe and the U.S., but on the global scale. We observe a backlash against gender equality and gender identity and increased prioritisation of military security over human safety.

We hear a lot about international law these days. It is too abstract, dreamt up by elites. We need to rephrase it as a vital principle of protection of humanity in the wake of the horrors of the Second World War. Although it has its flaws in national framework, it provides a useful benchmark against which to measure state actions. It must be reinforced and strengthened. We have to be persistent in this discussion. Because if we obliterate it, we will live in a new world order based on greed, self-interest, and dominance of the strongest. Therefore, we need to fight for it, notwithstanding the fatigue that was mentioned. There is no alternative. To give new spirit to the Helsinki Final Act, in Andrea's understanding, is to insist on the notion that there can be no comprehensive security without respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and active civic engagement.

Across the OSCE region, we are witnessing the erosion of the Helsinki principles and the authorities attacking free media and independent voices. In this context, adding to Sebastian's picture of the situation in Central Asia, Andrea noted a chilling effect of Russia's influence on the adoption of the infamous foreign agent laws in Kyrgyzstan and other countries. Even the mentioning of them already has a chilling effect. People know exactly how it goes. In Kazakhstan, it is a document with very vaguely defined definitions of what is political work and alien values, with accusations of international NGOs.

The current Washington narratives find a ground in the Central Asian region under the disguise of protection of traditional values. This discourse has been there for many years, but it is getting much stronger now. Pressure is particularly severe for feminist and LGBT organisations. In Kazakhstan, groups like Feminita face legal harassment and political intimidation, for just trying to register public events.

Beyond legal restrictions, the environment for freedom of expression is deteriorating. For alleged spreading of false information, people are prosecuted and silenced. There are severe restrictions on internet access and free speech in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Andrea noted that in Europe civic space is under increasing strain as well. There is a rise of nationalist "security first" policies, funding cuts, tighter scrutiny of civil society groups and less political will to champion human rights abroad. The environment is getting tougher, but in response civil society is more agile, more connected than ever. We have more tools at our disposal than ever. But certainly, we need more support and we need to improve, to constantly find new ways, and think out of the box.

Andrea described three fields in which civil society organisations should make the effort. The first one she put under the heading "unite". It is about strengthening solidarity and collective advocacy. We must work across borders and sectors to amplify the voices of people at risk, activists at risk, and organisations at risk. This includes coordinated campaigns, joint statements, and raising individual cases at various fora. But it also means reaching out to new audiences, as discussed in Warsaw at the first Helsinki+50 seminar last September.

The primary challenge here, Andrea stressed, is to develop understanding of what can be done and to build trust in the human rights movement among the general public. It goes into narratives and language. Sometimes, it is not understood what the human rights movement does and whose interest it represents. We have to reach out to people and explain that it is not just a scientific and complicated elitist bubble. It is necessary to reflect carefully about what people are concerned about, communicate better with them, and be partners of broader movements. And in particular, to put issues of social justice and climate change on the agenda of human rights organisations more.

The second area of work is under "innovate" heading. Innovate in protection and support. In the face of new and tougher legislation on foreign agents and funding restrictions, we need to increase the use of new models of support by providing direct financial legal assistance, digital security tools, developing flexible funding schemes that help people remain resilient even under duress. We need to think about emergency funding. A crowdfunding option should be seriously considered.

The third field is persistence in holding states accountable. Even as many governments are closing the door now to international scrutiny, we have to continue documenting abuses, publishing evidence-based reports and pushing for accountability. We know that if you take UN recommendations to governments, even very authoritarian ones, they are reacting to them. So, it is still important to stay very engaged. We just have to make sure that these violations do not go unrecorded.

Coming back to the OSCE and the role it can play in the face of shrinking civic space, Andrea reiterated that we should be very persistent in our message to the OSCE. We need also to shape policy response by the OSCE, not only to participate in its meetings.

What can the OSCE do now? The first one would be to track civic space metrics as early warning data. Shrinking space predicts instability. Therefore, monitoring of civic space could be used as an indicator of broader security threats. The OSCE should strengthen this line of work and use it as part of an enhanced early warning mechanism. In this respect, the role of the Special Representative on Civil Society could be also enhanced. Likewise, we should focus not only on violations of fundamental freedoms but on monitoring of enabling environment, supporting legal and regulatory framework.

Secondly, the OSCE should use its already existing mechanisms more effectively and more systematically. The Moscow and Vienna mechanisms have been used more often lately, but they are still applied with great caution while they were designed precisely to address serious human rights concerns and emerging crisis.

And thirdly, the OSCE and its participating States have to ensure sustainable funding and emergency funding. Andrea mentioned talks which the International Partnership for Human Rights had held with the Swedish delegation because Sweden chairs the OSCE Human Dimension Committee this year. IPHR has encouraged them to establish a Helsinki+50 "emergency fund for civil society". They took it quite positively and would like to foster it with the OSCE Chairpersonship. So, maybe this point can be taken up in our further discussions. The emergency is already here. In the absence of systematic long-term funding, emergency funding seems to be particularly important.

Andrea emphasised that the Helsinki process is a compelling historic lesson from which we learned that despite repression, civil society groups demanding implementation of the Helsinki principles in the field of human rights ultimately made a great contribution to the fall of authoritarian regimes and the expansion of democracy. Remembering about these historical roots is a driving factor despite all the current grim developments and the feeling that the world is falling apart.

Andrea pointed out that there are some positive developments as well. Last year, the UN General Assembly paved the way for starting a work on a first ever international treaty on crimes against humanity. The resolution with this decision was adopted by consensus.

Also, in Central Asia, if you look at smaller areas, Uzbekistan criminalised domestic violence, and strong regional networks of human rights lawyers were successful in convicting torturers and receiving compensation for at least some victims. A few days ago, legislation in Tajikistan was amended to cease criminal punishment of people who put "likes" under social media posts.

To finish her presentation, Andrea referred to Irina Scherbakova, co-founder of Memorial, who quoted poet Anna Akhmatova's words: "Sometimes despair is better than hope". Hope is associated with illusion and despair clarifies the true extent of a catastrophe. Scherbakova said that despite the fact that she is desperate, this gives her the strength to continue her work. So, although there is a mixture of feelings, let us choose the duty over despair and continue to push for the Helsinki principles.

The final speaker of the session was Anna Sevortian, an independent consultant, who presented the Human Rights Compass[1] initiative. The goal of the Human Rights Compass is to provide the wider European and international human rights community with a platform for real-time human rights policy analysis, coordination and resilience building.

The Human Rights Compass has three key elements:

- Convening key human rights stakeholders for coordinated policy advice and action;
- Publishing policy briefs to inform and guide advocacy;
- Promoting principled responses to systemic challenges that undermine international human rights frameworks.

[1] Human Rights Compass. See: https://progress-change-actionlab.org/human-rights-compass

“It started out of a sense of urgency,” Anna explained. The beginning of Donald Trump’s second presidency in the United States has coincided with shifts in the global human rights landscape. Political instability, policy reversals, and weakening international accountability have disrupted the work of human rights defenders (HRDs), organisations and institutions, and emboldened autocratic regimes around the world. As human rights frameworks face demise due to policy shifts and funding cuts, the need for coordinated action felt urgent.

The topic of the first Compass Convening meeting on 25 March 2025 was “Global Realignment: How to Avoid an Adverse Impact on Human Rights”.[2] It brought together 30 defenders from 20 countries, including representatives from prominent international and national human rights groups (ICNL, Human Rights Watch, several Helsinki groups, etc.).

One of the guiding questions for the convening was about global leadership, prompted by EU Vice President Kaja Kallas’s statement in February 2025 that “the free world needs a new leader”. The response from the convening was that the world does not need a single leader, but rather leadership in the form of value-driven coalitions and partnerships. The world also needs new approaches and coalitions within states and civil society, with human rights at the heart of the new global order.

Anna noted that the six recommendations made by the convening may be very relevant to the work of the OSCE and the Helsinki+50 initiative:

- Establish a cross-regional leadership coalition for human rights on the 80th anniversary of the United Nations Charter.
- Revitalise engagement with and support for human rights institutions and norms.
- Integrate human rights into the emerging European security and defence frameworks.
- Develop a coordinated narrative strategy to rebuild public trust.
- Protect and expand civic space in authoritarian and democratic states alike.
- Reframe funding models and foster intersectional civil society resilience.

Social security and the protection of economic and social rights must be prioritised, as must commitment to the women, peace and security agenda. This idea resonates with one of the earlier sessions within the Helsinki+50 reflection process.

At the first Human Rights Compass convening, HRDs strongly recommended connecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law with everyday concerns. They also emphasised that investment in security should not be viewed solely as an investment in defence, but also as an investment in human security.

Protecting and expanding civic space in both authoritarian and democratic contexts must also be on the agenda, with this commitment reflected in the new EU civil society strategy initiative[3] and

[2] Global Realignment: How to Avoid an Adverse Impact on Human Rights. Human Rights Compass. See https://progress-change-actionlab.org/human-rights-compass#kpg_209169

[3] EU Civil Society Strategy. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14588-EU-Civil-Society-Strategy-_en

the new EU multi-annual financial framework. Finally, the recommendation was made to reframe funding models and foster coalitions that connect human rights to other issues, such as climate change, social problems, and economic concerns, spanning sectors and regions.

The second Human Rights Compass Convening "Saving Lives, Upholding Rights",[4] which took place on 15 April 2025, addressed another relevant issue for the Helsinki+50 seminars.

The reduction in foreign aid is a global trend: even countries with a long-standing tradition of donorship have recently "deprioritised" foreign aid funding and plan further cuts. U.S. cuts in 2025 will amount to around 30% of global official development assistance (ODA), and the US administration redefined humanitarian assistance narrowly as a form of support that is "life-saving only".

This reductionist, "human-rights-free" view of humanitarian emergencies ignores their complexity and disregards the fact that human rights violations are often among the main causes and the consequences of humanitarian crises. Effective foreign aid should not intervene solely to address imminent threats to life, but to build resilient communities and reinforce inclusive development and peace, said the participants of the Convening.

In answer to questions, Anna commented that the Human Rights Compass is a pop-up initiative. It is self-funded, with significant input and time contributions from volunteers who have dedicated their lives to human rights work. She noted that sharing in-depth regional and topical expertise, comparing organisational strategies and approaches amid "global realignment", and fostering a sense of community are added values that the Compass provides.

In spring 2025 (Season 1), the Human Rights Compass held four convenings and published four policy briefs:

- Preventing an adverse impact on human rights today: "Global Realignment"[5] (25 March 2025)
- Humanitarian assistance vs human rights: "Saving Lives, Upholding Rights"[6] (15 April 2025)
- Human rights in multilateralism: "Fractured Order"[7] (13 May 2025)
- Human rights defenders: "Defending Defenders"[8] (27 May 2025).

All four briefs are available online and delivered in a targeted way to dozens of recipients in the global policy community (including states, parliaments, multilateral organisations and civil society groups, etc.). Planning for Season 2 of Human Rights Compass (autumn 2025) has already begun.

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[4] Saving Lives, Upholding Rights: Recommendations to Bridge Humanitarian Aid and Human Rights Amid Global Realignment. Human Rights Compass. See https://progress-change-actionlab.org/human-rights-compass#kpg_433165

[5] Global Realignment, op.cit.

[6] Saving Lives, Upholding Rights, op.cit.

[7] Fractured Order: Recommendations to Advance Human Rights Multilateralism. See https://progress-change-actionlab.org/human-rights-compass#kpg_166945

[8] Defending Defenders: Recommendations to Strengthen and Support Human Rights Defenders Amid Global Realignment. See https://progress-change-actionlab.org/human-rights-compass#kpg_633319

The second session was devoted to reflection on the internal situation of civil society. It aimed at looking into such questions as what is the future of human rights NGOs, how we can strengthen financial resilience and limit dependence on government and major private foundations in terms of funding, what new organisational models for civil society organisations are possible, what new approaches have worked lately, how our advocacy work should change, and, finally, is broader public engagement on human rights desirable and possible?

As moderator of the session, Natascha Cerny Ehtesham (Swiss Helsinki Committee) provided a summary of key themes the discussion could address – many of which had already emerged in conversations outside the formal conference setting.

One central theme was survival: How do our organisations endure? Participants have already raised concerns around financial resilience, resource mobilisation, and the psycho-social toll of the work – feelings of despair, fatigue, frustration, and disappointment were clearly present.

Another major topic was the importance of continuity – the need to keep doing the work we have long committed to: human rights monitoring, accountability, norm-setting, policy shaping, research and knowledge production, as well as coordination and the convening of spaces such as this one. There was a shared sense that innovation will be critical in sustaining this work.

The theme of unity also came through strongly: reinforcing civic solidarity, learning from each other, strengthening capacities, and generating ideas for joint advocacy and campaigning.

A significant area of focus was visibility, communication, and outreach. The need for a shared narrative was highlighted as crucial. While many valuable forums for discussion already exist – and should continue – the question remains: how can we come together, at least in terms of communication, to speak with a stronger, more unified voice? Building public trust is a significant challenge, but a necessary one if human rights are to remain central to political discourse.

Finally, the topic of innovation surfaced repeatedly – particularly the use of digital tools to ease our work and expand our reach. Exploring new funding mechanisms, including crowdfunding, donations, and other alternative financing options, was suggested as a priority.

In short, many pressing issues were raised – each deserving of deeper, continued dialogue.

Harry Hummel, the first speaker of the session, started with a comment that we need to emphasise people's own action for human rights, in addition to (but also to partially replace) our advocacy towards government for abiding by human rights norms. We need to invest in building constituencies for human rights that are aware of what human rights are and are actively engaged in realising and practicing human rights. This active engagement can express itself by giving money for human rights initiatives by various local actors, but there is a lot of scope for people's self-action on human rights, in their day-to-day relations, an in all kinds of local, national and international institutions and organisations they are involved in.

Harry had a concern about the realism of considering states as the main formulators of human rights and also as the main entity that should realise human rights. It looks as a nice idea to have states formulating human rights, agreeing on international standards and then us in civil society

being able to hold states accountable for whatever they do to not realise these standards, but we see them increasingly becoming less enthusiastic about or even outright reneging from taking this role seriously, and we need to question the very idea of states being the main standard-bearers of human rights.

Harry expressed his support to trying to keep up multilateralism, joining up with people around the world. But we need to start thinking about other avenues. The new OSCE Representative on Civil Society last week said that she thinks that all of us can be duty bearers on human rights issues. This is cursing in the church for hardcore human rights specialists, because in their view, the prime duty bearer is the state represented by a national government. But on the other side, many of us are part of institutions and organisations that also have a role realising human rights for people. A teacher can realise some human rights in teaching and also in the way the school is organised and the way he deals with pupils. The way in which pupils deal with each other has a human rights aspect to it. And then if these teachers and these schools organise at the national level, they can discuss this and self-define certain standards. And if they have international meetings, they can start talking about these things at the international level. There are very many of that type of examples that are possible and where we can pursue this type of action and this type of thinking.

Also, our own organisations should more explicitly self-declare adherence to certain human rights standards which are relevant internally, Harry stated. This leads to the notion of constituency-building for human rights and to ideas about how resources for human rights work can be found. In this context, Harry alleged that many of the bigger organisations, for example, an organisation of history teachers or a trade union, or a church, could create working groups on human rights with some of the resources of that bigger organisation devoted to this work.

Amnesty International is an example for some of the funding strategies that can and should be followed. Creating a membership base for your organisation, doing crowdfunding, and selling merchandise should be standard activities for NGOs. You can sell services to your stakeholders. If you are a lawyer working on social justice issues, you can gain money from part of your legal work and do human rights related cases pro bono alongside. There are many ways of trying to become a social enterprise.

Speaking about the need for a specific safe space in which human rights can be discussed, Harry referred to concrete physical spaces, such as libraries and cafes, that can play a role in organising a meeting place for people who want to be engaged in human rights activity. This idea of building local constituencies therefore has two important aspects that ideally should reinforce each other. One is resource creation and the other one is awareness raising and action generation.

Harry's final point was regarding funding that remains available for human rights work. There is a dilemma. Do we want to keep searching for funding for the work on direct monitoring and advocacy for human rights? Or do we want to invest more explicitly in organisation building and sustainability of civil society organisations? In the case of the Netherlands, in the NGO world a rule exists according to which organisations are allowed to spend a maximum of 25% of their budget on fundraising, with the aim of course to obtain income beyond this 25%. This could be the starting point for a discussion, whether we want to have an NGO model in which 25% of the expenditure is being devoted to raising resources. Fundraising activities overlap heavily with awareness raising

and publicity work. Harry believes that it is a healthier organisation model than the ones where NGOs are dependent on funding from their own government, other governments or private donors.

In his presentation, the next speaker, a representative of the Moscow Helsinki Group, agreed with Anna Akhmatova's words, quoted during the previous session, that despair is pure and more truthful than an illusory hope. The time of crisis, in which we live, gives us a lot of examples of despair, yet it is also a time of possibility. It is a time when many illusions are crashing down, and it is liberating in many ways.

At the same time, we cannot ignore that we live in the times of war. It is already part of our reality, and the question is whether this talk about shrinking space is relevant in the times of war. In this context, the speaker referred to the concept of islands of civicness as a certain counter-logic to war. The term has been developed by Mary Kaldor; some other scholars also looked into the effects of war on civil society. The term refers to spaces that manage to uphold civic values of human rights, nonviolence, justice, and participation even amid conditions of extreme violence, repression, or breakdown of public order. The example is Syria, where doctors replaced public authority and provided essential medical services and basically became a counter-response to the sectarian violence that was all around them. There have been similar examples during the Yugoslav wars. Libraries resisting the Trump administration discriminatory policies are exactly those islands of civicness. As well as alternative schools in Russia where people send children to, so that they would not be part of the government propaganda and that unite other parents and help them to teach their children about values of equality or civicness. This could be local peace initiatives, communities practicing inclusive dialogue, grassroots human rights defenders that exist beyond our usual NGO circle, informal networks that started building up, and so on. All of this could be used and could be expanded in the present times. Those islands of civicness exist as a contrast and as a strategy of resistance to militarised sectarian authoritarian logic that divides us along religious or ethnic lines, which is the logic of war. This could be quite an inspirational concept, because it is also provides a political position and a form of behaviour. It has a lot more mobilisation potential than our usual NGO expert-driven logic of policy recommendations.

We need to move from an NGO and expert focus to a movement centred on human rights, the speaker alleged. Human rights work has become increasingly professionalised. We have reports, toolkits, statements, best practices. All of this has its value. But too often, it comes at the price of depoliticization of our work and also disconnection from real communities. The movement is turning into a service industry, and that is why it has been so much hurt by the cutting of funds. Or it turns into a kind of policy advice factories, which is not necessarily attractive for people who see broader injustices and want to be part of a resistance movement against that.

Projects that start and end in funding cycles add to the overall vulnerability of the work that we do. This is not what the Helsinki movement originally was about. The Helsinki groups originally were not "implementing partners". They were movements of ordinary people documenting repression, challenging the state, and risking their freedom for a different vision of justice. By reclaiming that approach, we have a lot of potential to become one of the mobilising centres of the global resistance to the overall authoritarian repressive turn. This means that we need to return to organising a movement and also to connecting and supporting grassroots groups, those on the front lines, searching for new actors, and also acknowledging that education is fundamental to this. We need to come out of silos. We need to reach out to environmental defenders, anti-racist,

anti-colonial, anti-militarist, feminists movements. We are stronger than we recognise and our causes are shared by many people in many ways.

The second strategy is a shift to a more facilitative leadership and more participatory infrastructure. The speaker suggested to form informal groups that will elaborate on some of the ideas that were formulated during the seminars. Such groups could aim at facilitative leadership and participatory infrastructure because we need to change how we lead and engage with each other and with institutions. Civil society participation around the OSCE is mostly symbolic. The fact that we are allowed to speak sometimes is an illusion of influence. Sometimes, we are even applauded, but never allowed to shape the policies. Facilitative leadership is a key to change that as it means moving away from top down advocacy and more towards participatory deliberative horizontal forms of leadership. Experiments like the Human Rights Compass, cited earlier, is one example of such approach. We can come up with many ideas, but we need to challenge the usual way of doing it and invite people to participate more in discussing such issues and to find a language which can reshape them. And for that, we need civic educators, dialogue facilitators, people who can hold space and not just take space. The investment in this new kind of leadership is something that we need, because this is not just about the process, it is about reclaiming the power. The key to participation is not that you are allowed to sit at the table, it is that you shape the decisions that come out of the discussions. The Helsinki movement, which pretty much shaped the OSCE, did not ask for permission. It just did what it did because it was important, and engaged with diplomats like the Helsinki Commission in the U.S. Congress, for instance. We can still find allies even in hostile governments or in governments that used to be friendly and are now not anymore. There are people who are on our side, even if the governments are not.

The third strategy the speaker proposed was on trans-local solidarity and transnational alliances, which have already been mentioned quite a few times during the day. Human rights do not belong to the capitals in the Western Europe, or to the boardrooms in Vienna or Geneva. In that sense, there are more opportunities outside our usual circles of allies. We need to reach out to the Global South, to indigenous defenders, or climate justice warriors, or exiled civic activists, people from countries like Iran or Syria who have built a certain infrastructure of support outside of their own countries. Those actors resisted multiple forms of violence, including military, racial or economic violence, and they have also built alternatives. There is a lot to learn from them.

At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that there was a tendency for many NGOs in the West to look into human rights violations abroad, and we needed that kind of support then, but sometimes it came at the price of overlooking adverse human rights developments in their own countries. Discussion is shifting towards a more balanced approach nowadays. There is a turn to look at human rights violations at home, but also to build links with human rights struggles abroad. The speaker noted that he was arguing before for “Helsinki from below”, but now it is time to argue also for “Helsinki beyond borders”.

Presentation by Natalie Losekoot (Araminta) covered aspects of the work of her organisation that are relevant for the Helsinki+50 process. Natalie started with discussing the implementation of a recommendation that has been made many times and that is needed now more than ever – access for human rights defenders to safe spaces when they are at risk.

Araminta has taken the lead in developing a draft of an EU Human Rights Defenders Mobility Directive. Its provisions would require EU member states to ensure that human rights defenders from third countries have access to the EU through visa facilitation when they are at risk, and that they also would have a legal residence status (including employment rights, social rights, health care rights) to make sure they can continue their work in exile.

Situation when human rights defenders are no longer able to work within their own country and also are not able to leave it due to the lack of access to visas and a legal status in safe countries is linked to the question of security of defenders at risk. Due to security risks, including persecution by authorities, imprisonment, and physical violence, reporting by local defenders on human rights violations in these countries will be limited. There will be less information about the situation in these countries that we need and that would be important for the OSCE and the EU. Addressing this problem is a part of the OSCE responsibility. It has to make sure that if we there are no opportunities for civil society in those countries to work freely, activists would need to receive safe space in other countries where they can continue their work. In a way, it is linked to the "civic island" concept discussed earlier. The EU area can be that island. At the moment, it is not willing to be such an island – access to the EU is not easy from many countries. Those human rights defenders who managed to enter EU, have to deal more with the struggle for their legal status than with continuing their human rights work. We need to have a safe civic island where human rights defenders in exile can continue their work without the necessity to chase legal status and funding. If we do not have the ability to ensure that there is such a safe space, the crucial work of defenders from authoritarian countries will stop.

Natalie said that this new EU mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders inside the EU, if it is adopted, could actually become a global mechanism in and of itself. This is where the bridge is – the OSCE can make sure that it is aligned with the initiatives that are coming up through different regional mechanisms. We know that ODIHR is developing updated guidelines on security of human rights defenders. The UK is doing that too. So, there are all these little pieces which need to be connected, and we can help this to happen.

Next, Natalie turned to the question of individual discussions we have with different state representatives of (still) friendly governments. She shared her experience with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office which was interested in knowing what is happening in civil society in different countries – this information would help it to develop briefings on civil society challenges for their missions abroad. This is the kind of action we need to support, but also make sure that missions actually follow-up, and more generally make sure that human rights concerns are part of the missions' mandate. Since not all of them are sensitised to human rights, we can help them with that.

The EU has new guidelines on visas which for the first time include reference to human rights defenders. However, these guidelines do not work. This is one of the things that we need to work on, engaging with missions on the ground to make sure they follow the guidelines and ensure access and mobility of human rights defenders to the EU. If we do not make sure that the existing rules are effectively applied, there is not much sense in trying to create any new recommendations.

Another question is making sure that we are not paralysed by despair. Araminta looked at the mental health issue. It is a question of both organisational health and individual burnout

prevention. If we do not address this question, we will not see each other next year. Some of us will just decide to discontinue their work. At the same time, we need to have support amongst each other. Natalie expressed her appreciation of the fact that we came together to this seminar, because the amount of trust in this room is great.

Natalie reiterated that there are three things that are important for building safe spaces: the mobility question, the mental health question, and trust and partnership. We should include them in recommendations that will be brought to OSCE bodies, participating States and civil society.

The discussion that followed the presentations allowed to raise a variety of issues. Several participants reacted to the intervention about new modes of organising the human rights movement. It was noted that against the background of a decreasing funding support from governments and also from private donors, the choice for many human rights groups would be between two basic options. One of them has been mentioned by the speakers before – a wide public mobilisation. Those who manage to do that can use the model of social movements and try to more prominently bring human rights into social justice struggle. Others would have to turn into kind of individual crusaders like some of our colleagues from previous generations in the East, who were doing what they believed was right, being very few and acting in very dire circumstances.

It was observed that crowdfunding is not a new model of funding, but a forgotten old one. It has been in existence for 50-60 years in the West and maybe for 25 years in the East. Before that, it was all voluntary contribution, voluntary labour, and private donations. Going back to that is an option, but this merits a long further discussion. In some countries, it would not be very easy because people can get persecuted for the very fact of donating to a human rights organisation. This is something that we see happening at a massive scale now in Belarus, to some extent in Russia and other countries. So, there is no universal recipe. Another problem is that the audience that traditionally is sympathetic to human rights causes in the East is not necessarily the wealthiest part of the population. As authoritarianism grows and oppression increases, and economic situation is worsening, people simply stop giving.

It was noted that although we all agree, on the theoretical level at least, that we will need to do more volunteer work and involve others to provide such input, we also have responsibility as directors of organisations or leaders of sectors, for people who depend on the income and provide for their families. This has been the system that we have worked in for many years, and it is a challenge to address it. You cannot simply tell your 15 or 20 of your staff members and multiply it by three or four members of their families, “from tomorrow you will be working as volunteers”. Also, to develop a financial strategy and implement it, to build big alliances with broad movements, to build new communication strategies, to continue influencing multilateral organisations and states, all this cannot be done entirely voluntarily, it requires professional work. We need further discussions on how to combine the volunteerism with this rather demanding and professional areas of expertise.

Another strategy that everyone agreed with was building broad alliances with existing movements. It was noted, however, that there is a challenge that it will take a lot of time to find our place there and preserve our identity, and at the same time, understand and be clear about what we disagree with in engaging with some of these movements. There are lots of caveats in building these broad alliances, and we have to be cognizant about them.

An observation was voiced that when we see the states openly challenging human rights standards, or beyond that, any international legal norms, continuing to try to shame states for not observing their legal international legal obligations seems to have a very limited impact. Probably, it will stop working at all at some point. In this sense, we will probably need to look back to the pre-1945 human rights campaigning when there were no international legal standards in the field, but still people managed to campaign for the abolition of slavery, gender equality, other human rights causes, using mostly moral arguments. We should be learning from that experience.

The question was raised about what do we mean when we refer to human rights? On the one hand, this is self-evident, but the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights was different from what was later referenced in the Helsinki Final Act, and advocacy around them was different too. At the same time, it has been argued that human rights became kind of a connecting language among different organisations and different social movements. In Finland in the 1980s, it inspired environmental activists, who might not have worked as much with the Helsinki process, but they knew about it and were influenced by it. There was this longer-term soft connection. Does the language of human rights have the same resonance today with new activists as it did previously? The University of Oxford did a public perception survey, which showed that 86% of citizens worldwide believe that countries should work together despite their differences to address the climate crisis, and 80% believe that their country should do more to address the climate crisis. This is the zeitgeist that motivates people to engage in democracy today. The hidden potential of the Helsinki process was when activists understood its language and worked together. We should consider this interesting historical perspective and consider employing issues like climate change as unifying topics in both building alliances and engaging youth.

The third session was aimed at planning for 2025 and beyond. Discussion of interventions at the Helsinki conference, public outreach, publications and online actions tied to the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act as well as engagement with the OSCE after the conference and beyond 2025 was envisaged.

Yuri Dzhibladze (Freedom Files and iSANS) spoke about how we can digest and process everything that was discussed not only during the present seminar but also in earlier Reflection Project meetings and turn it into something that can be presented in Helsinki around the 50th anniversary and play a useful role there. He outlined the main events and processes that we can use and fit in in 2025 and beyond, what we can potentially offer, and what our instruments of possible engagement are.

The most immediate big opportunity is the conference organised by the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship in the end of July – early August in Helsinki. From what we have heard from the Finnish delegation in Vienna and the Taskforce in Helsinki, the goals and the agenda of the conference are in the hands of the OSCE Chair-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs Elina Valtonen. Leadership of Finland sees the conference as an important opportunity for gathering political leaders of OSCE participating States to discuss the current security challenges and exchange ideas on re-building European security architecture. The first day of the conference, 31 July, is, therefore, seen primarily as a meeting of ministers of foreign affairs. Altogether, the Chairpersonship aims at having 1,000 people participating in the meeting in the historical Finlandia Hall. It is a high-level meeting, with a stronger role of the Chairpersonship in defining the modalities and the expected outcome than at the OSCE Ministerial Council.

Finland is apparently preparing an outcome document of the conference. How will they approach the deliberations and adoption – if it is at all possible – is, however, not clear. Whether all 57 states will participate or Russia, Belarus and possibly some others will abstain from attending or will not be invited, we also do not know. The fact that the Finnish Taskforce requested the CSP, as the convener of the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process, to submit its input on the future of the OSCE, responding to the Taskforce's questionnaire, speaks for their intention to try to collect different contributions. They have also requested a contribution from the OSCE Expert Network.

It looks like that civil society will have little space on the first day in the presence of ministers and OSCE leadership. The information we have is minimal, but apparently, the organisers will invite very few civil society representatives to speak, such as our colleague Oleksandra Matviichuk. We will find this out and will have a chance to ask them to incorporate some of the key outcomes of our deliberations in their remarks.

The second day, 1 August, is where civil society and think tanks will be able to present their findings in parallel sessions. This day will be attended by political directors of the ministries of foreign affairs of participating States. We are being told that "this is your moment" to bring our ideas and recommendations to the attention of people who really define foreign policies of governments.

We should use this opportunity as much as possible, Yuri stressed, and there are several possibilities in terms of documents to present. One is an outcome document of the Helsinki+50 reflection process, where the results of the five seminars and online discussions will be summarised, including the essential elements of the analysis and key recommendations. An explanatory note with more details can be added. This format worked well in the Hague Declaration two years ago, which was a civil society declaration on the reform of the Council of Europe. We will put together an editorial group for this document.

Secondly, we will distribute five reports from the expert seminars of the Reflection Project. Whoever wants to go deeper on political-military security, addressing the environmental crisis, civil society engagement in the Helsinki process, evolution of the human rights movement, etc., will have an opportunity to read the reports. They will be distributed along with a few policy papers that have been or will have been produced by experts of the seminars.

Another idea that emerged at the previous seminar is a civil society manifesto. Something conceptual and direct, a set of principles. The 50th anniversary is something that requires a clear position from us.

Two short manifestos have been actually discussed, not just one. Number one could be a civil society manifesto on upholding the Helsinki principles 50 years after its adoption. It should be very short, 10 principles maximum. About half of them could be about upholding the Helsinki principles "from below", building of a broad constituency in support of the Helsinki principles. These will not be an appeal to someone, but rather a statement of intent, what we think should be done and what we commit to embarking on. Another half of principles could include our demands or expectations from participating States. That would be a civil society manifesto on the Helsinki process.

Since two out of our five seminars were on political-military security, and the states are very much preoccupied with security concerns, it is worth issuing another statement, on our view on

comprehensive security. That, again will be simple and short 10 points on the importance of all three dimensions being part of the comprehensive security. This is something obvious, but needs to be reinstated clearly on the role of civil society as a key actor not only in the third and the second dimensions, but also in the first dimension, including the work on conflict cycle. It will also cover our view on how a sustainable and just peace should look like, both in terms of the settlement in ending the Russian aggression against Ukraine and in terms of a longer term perspective – based on international law, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, the "people first" principle, accountability for international crimes committed during a conflict, etc. All this clearly cannot fit into the same document as the Helsinki principles manifesto, so it has to be a distinct short document.

With these two principle-based manifestos we may draw more attention as compared to a longer outcome document of the Helsinki+50 reflection project, and maybe even occupy or claim more space at the Helsinki conference, if we do good publicity around them.

Yuri's final point regarding the conference in Helsinki was supporting the idea of developing a short statement on our approach to the peace negotiations aimed at ending the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which was discussed at the previous seminar. Putting it together should not be extremely difficult because there are already similar statements by Ukrainian NGOs, Russian human rights defenders, and a number of others.

As regards our work to uphold the Helsinki principles, our road potentially can be divided into two parallel tracks. First direction are attempts at preserving good things in the OSCE and improving some of them that could be improved, but using the principle that for us, it is not the OSCE as such is important, but the Helsinki principles themselves.

Second direction of work would be the expansion, building a broad movement in support of the Helsinki principles. The form and shape of how this parallel two tracks will be organised is something to discuss. The CSP is rather amorphous in terms of institutional arrangements and it is more individual people and sometimes organisations behind them that take the lead. It will be probably done through informal working groups, following up to the discussions in the Helsinki+50 reflection process.

In terms of concrete occasions and events in the OSCE context, there will be a couple of more this year after the Helsinki conference. The annual Warsaw Human Dimension Meeting at the end of September – early October should be a possibility for us to follow-up to events in Helsinki and talk to delegations of States and OSCE institutions more actively with our ideas and proposals from the reflection process.

So far, we have two preliminary agreements. One is for a side event together with the CiO Special Representative on Civil Society. She agreed to be part of our side event if we can do it on the first week when she plans to be present in Warsaw. Obviously, this should be something on the role of civil society in upholding the Helsinki principles and on our expectations from the OSCE in addressing closing civic space. We have plenty of recommendations on that, including from the first seminar of the reflection process in Warsaw and from discussions today.

Another preliminary arrangement was reached when we recently talked with the ODIHR leadership. We suggested a series of meetings by a group of CSP representatives at ODIHR to have discussions with its various departments and programmes, focusing on the recommendations coming from the reflection process seminars and concrete ideas for stronger cooperation with the institution.

In the end of the year, there will be a Ministerial Council meeting in Vienna. We need to decide on whether we want to do a traditional parallel conference there. There are some among us who think that this format has become not very effective while taking up a lot of resources which are increasingly scarce. At the same time, not using the occasion for engagement when ministers and delegations are present would be a wasted opportunity. We may think of some other format, possibly with a smaller group of people coming to Vienna to do a side event, a presentation of a declaration, or something else, instead of having several dozen persons being there for a whole day at a parallel conference with limited impact.

Finally, there is the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship coming in 2026, which we need to start preparing for right away. A group of CSP representatives has already had a preliminary meeting with the Swiss Ambassador and his team in Vienna, and this engagement will be continued. There is a set of proposals on further steps from our Swiss NGO colleagues. They are getting organised, reviving the Swiss NGO Working Group they had at the time of the previous Swiss Chairpersonship in 2014. There is an idea about a CSP delegation coming to Bern to have meetings with Swiss NGOs and coordinate actions for 2026. A visit to the Foreign Ministry and talks with the Taskforce during this trip would be also desirable. From what is already known, Switzerland remains committed to working with civil society. Therefore, this hopefully will be one of their substantive priorities, like in 2014. However, the Ambassador also warned us that the situation in Switzerland is different from what was 11 years ago; there is much less money now, we should not expect many gatherings and conferences. We need to think about what we could propose to the Swiss Chairpersonship in terms of cooperation. Ideas expressed so far include upgrading the 2014 Guidelines on Security of Human Rights Defenders, revitalising the Focal Point on torture prevention at ODIHR, and appointing a new strong Special Representative on Civil Society, cooperating on conflict cycle, climate justice, and feminist perspective on comprehensive security. We may also think of some public formats to generate public interest in and support to the Helsinki principles.

The session continued with a brainstorming exercise on points to include in a civil society manifesto. This process was done in four parallel groups. After the brainstorming, four speakers presented outcomes of the discussions. Some points were repeated by different groups. In the present report, all the points mentioned by the presenters are grouped under two headings – the "Helsinki from below" (strengthening civil society's ability to uphold the Helsinki principles inside and outside of the OSCE) and the "Helsinki from above" (underlining which principles are the most important to us and strengthening civil society's ability to influence policies and actions by OSCE bodies and participating States).

"Helsinki from below":

- work to increase awareness of the Helsinki principles on different levels of civil society outside of traditional circles of those who engage with the OSCE;

- reach out to different groups and segments of civil society to build coalitions and a broader movement for the promotion of and upholding the Helsinki principles;
- proactively look for allies in various parts of a broader society that could be interested in upholding the Helsinki principles;
- promote the Helsinki principles from below in a simple language rather than expert jargon to make the principles accessible to a broader society;
- engage professional communications teams when working on materials for the broader public tailored to specific audiences;
- reorganise to make civil society more visible and make its materials more accessible;
- use the CSP to amplify other voices in civil society to express solidarity with them, especially those that are at risk and most vulnerable;
- undertake joint efforts to develop resilience models for civil society organisations;
- change our approach in upholding the Helsinki principles from reactive to proactive;
- combine activism with expertise and appreciate both.

"Helsinki from above":

- ask not "what the OSCE can do for you", but "what you can do for the OSCE" – put efforts into helping OSCE bodies, institutions and programmes become more relevant and influential;
- reiterate that the Helsinki principle that human rights are not an internal matter of any participating State but a matter of legitimate concern for all other participating States is of central importance for us;
- underline that human dignity is a basis of human rights; Paris and Copenhagen documents have references to this notion, and it remains valid today;
- focus on the importance of the cross-dimensional approach in realising the Helsinki concept of comprehensive security, aimed at overcoming the compartmentalisation of the three dimensions; underline the importance of the connection between human rights and security and insist that the comprehensive security is impossible without human rights and the rule of law;
- advocate for a better understanding of the role of civil society and recognition of CSOs as key actors and partners of OSCE bodies and participating States in the implementation of the Helsinki principles and realising the concept of comprehensive security;
- highlight gender aspects of prevention, participation, and protection, based on the feminist analysis, and advocate for the application of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in OSCE work;
- explain to OSCE bodies, institutions and participating States the diverse and evolving nature of civil society in order to overcome the artificial division into "experts" and "activists" in different OSCE dimensions;
- advocate for the creation of enabling and safe spaces for human rights defenders, peace builders and other civil society people at risk;

- advocate for the creation of civil society advisory boards at all OSCE institutions;
- advocate for the establishment of a Helsinki+50 fund for both emergency support and sustainable long-term funding of civil society work on upholding the Helsinki principles;
- advocate for the development of tools for systematic review of the implementation of commitments by participating States;
- advocate for the application of new creative ways of and platforms for effective implementation of the Helsinki principles by participating States, including those beyond the OSCE framework, such as in foreign policies and bilateral relations of States;
- advocate for the launching the Moscow Mechanism in respect of a breach of the Helsinki principles by the U.S.

Additionally, it was noted by one of the groups that the civil society manifesto will need a preamble. The following draft text was suggested: "Fifty years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, we believe in the continued relevance of the Helsinki principles and of the concept of comprehensive security. At the same time, we have to recognise that the OSCE is in a crisis due to three factors: first, the inability to prevent and stop the largest war in Europe since World War II; secondly, the increasing lack of implementation of OSCE commitments by participating States in all three dimensions; thirdly, the Organisation's failure to take up and address new and emerging challenges to comprehensive security and leaving it to the other stakeholders to address them."

It was also suggested that the manifesto should not be a list of demands and recommendations to the states, but a conceptual statement of what we believe is important and what we as civil society can do or commit to be doing.

The final session was aimed at reflecting at what was discussed during the previous sessions and brainstorming on recommendations to OSCE bodies, participating States and civil society.

Participants reflected on what was discussed during this and the previous seminars of the reflection project in an open brainstorming fashion. In addition to voicing ideas on recommendations to OSCE actors, practical aspects on further civil society's work on the suggested documents were discussed.

The parliamentary dimension and the importance of parliamentary control was mentioned again as something that needs to be included in the manifesto.

A necessity to address the gender backlash was mentioned again, and, in this context, some concrete proposals were put forward that will be presented at the Gender Equality Conference and could be included in the Helsinki+50 project outcome documents as well as the manifesto.

A concern was voiced that many of the suggestions from the previous session, even those that came under the heading of "Helsinki from below", still referred to the OSCE and attempts to do things through the OSCE. Meanwhile, it is important to take action independently from states, mobilising other parts of civil society and broader public as well as working with other multilateral organisations. Even if the OSCE seizes to exist in one year, the philosophy behind the Helsinki

process is worth preserving. Promoting and implementing the Helsinki principles can be done by involving various international, semi-governmental or non-governmental organisations and movements.

Global thinking approach is needed, stressed some participants. We need to place our manifesto in the context of worldwide struggles. We need the Global South to influence the situation in Europe.

Several participants raised voices against the use of "from above" and "from below" in discussions and official documents. It was suggested that it implies certain hierarchy and that we need to find a more inclusive term, because we have been advocating for many years for civil society to be seen as a partner for cooperation and not someone "below".

Against this background, it was suggested that to form alliances with groups from the wider world, we need to switch from generating texts to taking concrete steps aimed at building a genuine movement. We need to make efforts to establish links and direct contacts. A proposal was made to establish another working group with the aim to build contacts and set up meetings with civil society organisations from India and South Africa. It is a long process, which will not come easy, but there is a lot of interest on both sides in reaching out beyond the usual circle.

Several products that participants agreed to produce in the coming days and weeks were further discussed in practical terms. The most urgent document was a brief statement on the conditions of peace agreement on Ukraine. We have a number of documents already in this regard, statement by Ukrainian NGOs on sustainable peace, a statement from the People's First campaign, the statement initiated by the Russian Anti-War Platform and its partners, the recent statement by the Council of Russian Human Rights Defenders, and other statements. Several people volunteered to draft it, including those who expressed their availability during the previous seminar when this idea was first discussed. Another urgent document was an input in the preparation of a document of the Helsinki conference developed by the Finnish Taskforce by 12 May.

An idea to develop a statement on the negative impact of the Trump administration policies on civil society or its broader violation of OSCE commitments was welcomed by participants. It was noted, however, that it is not entirely clear where and when this document could be presented. A third SHDM which is going to take place in June and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly annual session at the end of June – early July in Porto were named among meetings where side events can potentially be organised. An idea to use the opportunity of a Flag Day in the United States (14 June) to present this document was also voiced. It is also Donald Trump's birthday, and he wants to have a military parade in Washington DC to commemorate the Flag Day. This might be a good day to release a report like that. The Warsaw Human Dimension Conference in autumn could be probably the best opportunity to draw attention to the document, and this would give us enough time to plan. We could bring a variety of speakers – it would be a great opportunity to invite American civil society organisations to come to the WHDC and, perhaps, join the CSP.

Document number four was a civil society manifesto on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. There were too many ideas and some were a bit too technical. It was proposed to create an editorial group having one person from each of the groups formed during the session

three, which will have a month to do the editing. Those who wrote on flip charts were asked to take them and transcribe into a typed Microsoft Word file. Volunteers from each group were identified.

Next possible document could be an appeal on a CSP position on security measures essentially based on the third and the fourth seminars of the project. Several volunteers were identified from participants of this, as well as earlier seminars.

Finally comes an outcome document of the Helsinki+50 project, to be distributed in July. A strong editorial group is needed, as we have five reports from the seminars and some other ideas that did not fit in the seminars but were presented in expert papers written for the reflection project, including a paper on the feminist perspective on security. Also, the Reflection Group can be asked if there is anything else they would like to add to the pile of ideas that has not been discussed at the seminars. At the same time, we are looking at a short document with around 20 recommendations and, potentially, a bit longer explanatory note.

Wrapping up the session, its moderator, Yuri Dzhibladze, noted that this was the end of the seminar series in the Reflection Project, and ideas for a follow-up work were welcomed. We would need resources to bring people in person together, but this is always much more effective and valuable when you sit together rather than speak through the screen, he noted. This assessment was unanimously supported by the participants.

Recommendations

To OSCE bodies, institutions and participating States:

- resist reversal of state policies that openly challenge the primacy of international law and human rights law and promote a transactional approach to foreign policy, where strategic utility, self-interest, and dominance of the strongest outweigh principled engagement and cooperation, and where military security is increasingly prioritised over human security, leading to serious negative consequences for global human rights protections, weakening of accountability, and the erosion of the Helsinki principles;
- integrate human rights and human security into the emerging European security and defence frameworks; do not be view investment in security solely as an investment in defence, but also as an investment in human security;
- more actively resist the spreading to various countries of the adoption of “foreign agent” laws, broadly defined “anti-extremism” laws, measures to limit freedom of expression and access to information, and other legislation and policies aimed at supressing civil society activities;
- oppose the backlash against gender equality and gender identity and the growing pressure against feminist and LGBTQ+ organisations and activists under the disguise of protection of traditional values;
- monitor civic space metrics as an indicator of broader security threats and use it as part of an enhanced early warning mechanism;
- develop a better understanding of the role of civil society and recognise CSOs as key actors and partners of OSCE bodies, institutions, and participating States in the implementation of the Helsinki principles and the realisation of the concept of comprehensive security;

- recognise that the history of the Helsinki process is a compelling lesson, teaching us that despite repression, civil society groups demanding implementation of the Helsinki principles in the field of human rights in the 1970s and 1980s made a great contribution to the fall of authoritarian regimes and the expansion of democracy. Remembering about these historical roots is still a driving factor, despite all the current grim developments;
- develop a better understanding of diverse and evolving nature of civil society and overcome the artificial division into "experts" and "activists" in different OSCE dimensions;
- ensure access to safe spaces for human rights defenders and other civil society members at risk, including by addressing the mobility question (facilitating access to visas, ensuring efficient process of obtaining legal residence status, including employment rights, social and health care rights to make sure they can continue their work in exile), the psychological and mental health question (including burnout prevention), and building trust and partnerships across borders; include the importance of creation of safe spaces for activists at risk in the updated ODIHR guidelines on security of human rights defenders and relevant national guidelines; ensure that the guidelines are actually implemented, including at the level of diplomatic missions;
- enhance the role of the CiO Special Representative on Civil Society with a mandate to focus not only on shrinking civic space, but also on creating the enabling environment for civil society both inside and outside of the OSCE;
- resist cuts in government funding for CSOs at both domestic and international levels; oppose the reductionist, "human-rights-free" view of humanitarian emergencies which ignores their complexity and disregards the fact that human rights violations are often among the main causes and the consequences of humanitarian crises; acknowledge that effective foreign aid should not intervene solely to address imminent threats to life, but to build resilient communities and reinforce inclusive development and peace;
- step in to fill in the gap by providing financial and political support to civil society organisations across the OSCE region which have been negatively affected by massive cuts of international assistance programmes by the U.S.;
- increase efforts to strengthen capacity of and provide financial support to local civil society organisations, especially in the regions where they are underdeveloped and face pressure from the authorities; consider this also as a preventive action to counteract attempts by China and Russia to establish their stronger presence and influence;
- consider establishing a Helsinki+50 fund for both emergency support and long-term sustainable funding of civil society work on upholding the Helsinki principles;
- study analysis and recommendations of the Helsinki+50 reflection project and other reflection and deliberation initiatives by civil society, responding to impacts of the new geopolitical environment, such as the Human Rights Compass.

To civil society:

- work to increase awareness of the Helsinki principles on different levels of civil society outside of traditional circles of those who have been engaged in working with the OSCE;
- given that states increasingly become less enthusiastic about or even outright renege from seriously upholding their role as the main bearers of human rights and the Helsinki

principles, we need to question the very idea of the central role of states in this process, stop relying on them, and start taking action independently from states, mobilising various parts of civil society and broader public, and working with other multilateral organisations. We should emphasise people's own action for human rights, in addition to our advocacy towards government for abiding by human rights norms, invest in building constituencies for human rights that are aware of what human rights are, actively engage in realising and practicing human rights, and understand that there is a lot of scope for people's self-action on human rights in their day-to-day relations and in all kinds of local, national and international institutions and organisations they are involved in;

- invest in the "Helsinki beyond borders" principle: reach out to different groups and segments of civil society to build coalitions, transnational alliances and a broader movement for the promotion and upholding of human rights and the Helsinki principles; search for opportunities outside our usual circles of allies; move from the focus on organised NGOs and expert work to building a broad movement centred on human rights which will help us to overcome disconnection from real life communities; for this, connect human rights, democracy, and the rule of law with everyday concerns, put issues of social justice, the backlash against gender equality and gender identity, and climate change on the agenda of human rights organisations; reach out to and support grassroots groups, environmental defenders and climate justice activists, anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-militarist, anti-war and feminists movements, activists and groups in the Global South, indigenous defenders, diasporas, exiled activists, etc.; switch from generating texts to taking concrete steps aimed at building a genuine movement, make concrete efforts to establish links and contacts;
- proactively look for allies in various parts of a broader society beyond CSOs that could be interested in upholding the Helsinki principles;
- ask not "what the OSCE can do for you", but "what you can do for the OSCE" – put efforts into helping OSCE bodies, institutions and programmes become more relevant and influential;
- in efforts to uphold the Helsinki principles, consider combining two parallel approaches – making stronger attempts at preserving good things in the OSCE and improving those that could be improved, and building a broad movement in support of the Helsinki principles;
- use the principle that for us, it is not the OSCE as such is important, but the Helsinki principles themselves; even if the OSCE seizes to exist, the philosophy behind the Helsinki process is worth preserving; implementing the Helsinki principles can be done by involving various international, semi-governmental, and non-governmental organisations and civic movements;
- make a shift to a more facilitative leadership and more participatory infrastructure in civil society; this will help us to change how we engage with each other and with international organisations, including the OSCE where we need to move from symbolic participation when we allowed to sit at the table to participating in shaping decisions and policies along with states and institutions;
- reorganise to make civil society more visible to the public and make its materials more accessible; build trust in the human rights movement among members of the public and explain what the human rights movement does and whose interest it represents;

- promote the Helsinki principles “from below” in a simple language rather than expert jargon to make the principles accessible to a broader society; engage with professional communications teams when working on materials for the broader public tailored to specific audiences;
- reinforce civic solidarity in concrete action; use the CSP to amplify other voices in civil society to express solidarity with them, especially those that are at risk and most vulnerable; work across borders and sectors to engage in collective advocacy;
- invest in the implementation of the concept of “islands of civicness” as a counter-logic to war and as a strategy of resistance to militarised, sectarian, and authoritarian logic. These are spaces that manage to uphold civic values of human rights, nonviolence, justice, and participation amid conditions of extreme violence, repression, or breakdown of public order. Examples include medical professional providing essential medical services in the middle of extreme violence of war and collapse of government institutions, libraries resisting discriminatory policies, private schools providing alternative to the government propaganda and helping parents to teach their children about values of equality and civicness, civic education projects, local peace initiatives, communities practicing inclusive dialogue, etc.;
- undertake joint efforts to develop new resilience models for civil society organisations;
- invest in decreasing civil society dependency on financial support from governments and private foundations; increase the use of innovative models of generating support such as crowdfunding, donations, creating a membership base, selling merchandise, selling legal and other services to stakeholders, applying a social enterprise approach, and other alternative models of funding;
- develop flexible funding schemes that help people remain resilient even under duress, including through emergency funding;
- more actively use digital tools to ease civil society work and expand our reach;
- combine activism with expertise and appreciate both;
- change our approach in upholding the Helsinki principles from reactive to proactive;
- pay attention to the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the Helsinki process and of the parliamentary control over the executive branch of the government; engage more actively with national parliaments and the OSCE PA;
- reiterate that the Helsinki principle that human rights are not an internal matter of any participating State but a matter of legitimate concern for all other participating States is of central importance for us;
- underline that human dignity is a basis of human rights; Paris and Copenhagen documents have references to this notion, and it remains valid today;
- focus on the importance of the cross-dimensional approach in realising the Helsinki concept of comprehensive security, aimed at overcoming the compartmentalisation of the three dimensions; underline the importance of the connection between human rights and security and insist that the comprehensive security is impossible without respect for human rights, the rule of law, and active civic engagement;

- highlight gender aspects of prevention, participation, and protection, based on the feminist analysis, and advocate for the application of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in OSCE work;
- advocate for a better understanding of the role of civil society and recognition of CSOs as key actors and partners of OSCE bodies and participating States in the implementation of the Helsinki principles and realising the concept of comprehensive security;
- explain to OSCE bodies, institutions and participating States the diverse and evolving nature of civil society in order to overcome the artificial division into "experts" and "activists" in different OSCE dimensions;
- advocate for the creation of civil society advisory boards at all OSCE institutions;
- advocate for the establishment of a Helsinki+50 fund for both emergency support and sustainable long-term funding of civil society work on upholding the Helsinki principles;
- advocate for the development of tools for systematic review of the implementation of commitments by participating States;
- advocate for a more effective and more systematic application of the Moscow and the Vienna mechanisms to address serious human rights concerns and emerging crises;
- be persistent in holding states accountable, continue documenting abuses, publishing evidence-based reports and pushing for accountability; make sure that violations do not go unrecorded; stay actively engaged with international human rights mechanisms;
- continue to engage in norm-setting, policy shaping, research and knowledge production, as well as coordination and the convening of discussion spaces;
- advocate for the application of new creative ways of and platforms for effective implementation of the Helsinki principles by OSCE participating States, including those beyond the OSCE framework, such as in their foreign policies and bilateral relations;
- advocate with states for the creation of safe spaces for human rights defenders, peace builders and other civil society activists at risk; remember that there are three important elements for building safe spaces: the mobility question (visas and legalisation in exile and creating working conditions in safe countries), addressing the psychological and mental health question, and building trust and partnership;
- develop a strategy of support to civil society in the U.S. in the context of the massive attack by the Trump administration on democratic institutions, human rights, and the rule of law; share with it the experience of working in repressive regimes, building solidarity, resisting politically motivated crackdown, developing broad civic engagement, ensuring digital, physical, and financial security, using international mechanisms, etc.; assist in preparing a paper, or a report, or a statement on violation of the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments by the Trump administration, and presenting it both in the U.S. and at OSCE fora; advocate for the launching of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism in respect of a breach of the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments by the U.S.; support efforts to document the negative impact of the Trump administration policies on civil society , human rights and democracy globally, including in the OSCE region;
- consider preparing several documents for the conference in Helsinki, including an outcome document of the reflection process, a civil society manifesto (or possibly two

manifestos – one on civil society position in respect of the importance of the Helsinki principles in connection of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Accord, the future of the OSCE, and what we as civil society commit to be doing, and another on our approach to comprehensive security, including the work on conflicts), and a statement on the conditions of sustainable peace, ending the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine;

- consider including a preamble in the civil society manifesto, reiterating the continued relevance of the Helsinki principles and of the concept of comprehensive security, and outlining our perspective on why we believe the OSCE is in crisis and needs to change.