



# **OUTCOME DOCUMENTS OF THE OSCE PARALLEL CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2025**

**VIENNA, 3 DECEMBER 2025**



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## INTRODUCTION

The Civic Solidarity Platform, a network of more than 100 human rights, democracy and peace NGOs from across the OSCE region,<sup>1</sup> convened the 2025 OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Vienna on 3 December 2025 with support of the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship and building upon the tradition of OSCE parallel civil society conferences in Astana 2010, Vilnius 2011, Dublin 2012, Kiev 2013, Basel 2014, Belgrade 2015, Hamburg 2016, Vienna 2017, Milano 2018, Bratislava 2019, Tirana 2020, Stockholm 2021, Łódź 2022, Skopje 2023, and Malta 2024. At the conference in Vienna, activists from across the OSCE region discussed and endorsed the outcome documents of the conference, developed by the Civic Solidarity Platform and its partners.

The outcome documents include the Vienna Declaration, entitled “Reviving the Helsinki Principles, Strengthening Security in a Comprehensive Way, and Ensuring Meaningful Civil Society Participation”, and a statement on country situations requiring urgent attention. The Declaration is inspired by expert discussions, analytical papers and the final documents of the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process,<sup>2</sup> organised by the Civic Solidarity Platform with support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the OSCE.

The outcome documents are addressed to the governments of OSCE participating States that will be gathering in Vienna for the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, as well as OSCE executive bodies and autonomous institutions, including the current and incoming Chairpersonships, the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Secretary General, OSCE programmes working under the auspices of the Secretariat, and the OSCE field operations.

We hope that analysis and recommendations in the outcome documents of the Parallel Conference will be studied carefully and used in the OSCE work. Moreover, we hope that they will contribute to recommitment by participating States to the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments, strengthening their realisation, making the OSCE more capable of effectively responding to the current crises and emerging challenges, assisting in ensuring a more prominent civil society role in the Helsinki process, and generating broader public support and engagement. We look forward to substantive reaction from all interested stakeholders.

We express our commitment as civil society actors to continue to actively engage in the work of the OSCE and our determination to contribute to the full realisation of the Helsinki principles in all three dimensions, implementation of the concept of comprehensive security, and ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law throughout the OSCE region.

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<sup>1</sup> The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) was established in December 2011 in Vilnius on the eve of the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference. Since then, it has grown to more than 100 member organisations from across the OSCE region. For more information about the CSP, please visit <https://www.civicsolidarity.org/>. The core group of the CSP founders had organised earlier the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Astana on the eve of the OSCE Summit in December 2010, and the CSP has been organising annual OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conferences since then.

<sup>2</sup> Ten Points for the Present and the Future: Outcome Document of the Helsinki+ Reflection Process. [https://civicsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Helsinki50-Reflection-Process\\_Outcome-document.pdf](https://civicsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Helsinki50-Reflection-Process_Outcome-document.pdf); Putting Human Security in the Centre of Implementing the Helsinki Principles: Civil Society Manifesto on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Final Helsinki Act. [https://civicsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Helsinki50\\_Civil-Society-Manifesto\\_eng.pdf](https://civicsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Helsinki50_Civil-Society-Manifesto_eng.pdf). For information about the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process, see <https://civicsolidarity.org/article/helsinki-50-reflection-process/>



# VIENNA DECLARATION

## REVIVING THE HELSINKI PROCESS, STRENGTHENING SECURITY IN A COMPREHENSIVE WAY, AND ENSURING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Presented at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference 2025

Vienna, 3 December 2025

As we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, as the most brutal war in Europe since World War II continues for almost four years, as civil society is under assault, as climate change threatens our future, and as human rights and democracy are in retreat across the OSCE region, we reflect on how the Helsinki principles can be an inspiration for action to revive the Helsinki process and strengthen the OSCE at this time of interconnected crises of comprehensive security.

Reflecting the challenging situation and our sense of urgency for strong actions in order to rebuild the OSCE's ability to respond to the current and emerging crises, in our analysis and recommendations we prioritise systemic approaches to restoring respect for the Helsinki principles and effective realisation of the comprehensive security concept, addressing concerns in the politico-military dimension of security, ensuring effective addressing of environmental security concerns, adopting a feminist perspective to security, protecting civic space, and expanding civil society engagement with the OSCE in all three dimensions with particular attention to its stronger role in the first and the second dimensions.

We are guided by the following questions:

- what states must do to fully realise the Helsinki principles and implement OSCE commitments;
- what OSCE structures should do to effectively fulfil their mandates;
- what civil society commits to do to realise the Helsinki principles in all three dimensions.

### 1. RESTORING RESPECT FOR THE OSCE ACQUIS AND UPHOLDING THE HELSINKI PRINCIPLES

#### *Problem statement and analysis*

We believe in the high importance and the continued relevance of the Helsinki principles and the comprehensive security concept. The value of multilateralism and the unique place the OSCE provides for civil society are as essential today as they were 50 years ago.

We recognise that the OSCE is in crisis due to such key factors as its inability to prevent and stop Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine, deteriorating implementation by participating

States of their OSCE commitments in all three dimensions, and a lack of accountability for systematic or gross violations.

Within the OSCE, compartmentalisation of the three dimensions undermines the comprehensive security concept while abuse of the consensus principle by states which are among the worst violators of the Helsinki principles limits effective decision-making and contributes to chronic underfunding.

Ensuring respect for the OSCE *acquis* is impossible without securing accountability of participating States for the failure to uphold the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments. Respect for the OSCE *acquis* has been seriously eroded in the last decade and a half as a number of participating States have openly and systematically violated their OSCE commitments. The lack of enforcement and absence of accountability mechanisms for violation of OSCE commitments is the biggest challenge to the effective implementation of the Helsinki principles. When a state blatantly violates the key Helsinki principles it should face international accountability. This is key to making these principles work when states disagree and when there is a lack of trust.

The Organisation has not engaged vigorously enough in addressing new and emerging challenges to comprehensive security such as the climate crisis, the impacts and causes of migration, the backlash against gender equality and gender identity, and the growing threats to political-military security by the use of hybrid non-military tools, largely leaving these tasks to other stakeholders.

We are particularly troubled by the OSCE's failure to fully utilise civil society's potential as a key actor in upholding the Helsinki principles, often limiting its engagement with civil society to a symbolic level.

The general public lacks awareness of the Helsinki principles and OSCE work, limiting popular demand for implementing the OSCE *acquis*.

### **Recommendations**

These problems require urgent attention by all who want the OSCE to address multiple international crises and its own institutional challenges. OSCE bodies, institutions, participating States and civil society should work together to uphold the OSCE conceptual framework and develop new instruments that would allow the Helsinki concept to work even when many States are no longer like-minded.

The OSCE must act as both a guardian of the Helsinki principles and a forum for dialogue. It should reinforce existing commitments, strengthen institutions, and be open to civic scrutiny and participation.

Renewed respect for the OSCE *acquis* can only be ensured through a combination of the following steps:

- political commitment of participating States to abide by the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments,



- increased political and financial support for OSCE autonomous institutions as key actors in monitoring implementation of commitments and assisting States in their implementation,
- more active and creative use of mandates of executive bodies and institutions and various OSCE tools not requiring approval by consensus,
- ensuring accountability of States for violations,
- civil society vigilance,
- meaningful engagement of OSCE bodies and participating States with civil society,
- and reaching out to members of societies by all concerned actors to generate broad public support for, engagement in, and ownership of the Helsinki process.

OSCE participating States should reaffirm that the key Helsinki principles of sovereign equality, refraining from the use of force, the inviolability of borders, guarantees for sovereignty of states, respect for the concept of comprehensive security, respect of the notion that implementation of human dimension commitments “are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned” are non-negotiable and should remain at the centre of the European security order. Any disputes between states should be settled peacefully. Above all, Russia must immediately end its war of aggression against Ukraine.

OSCE structures should be encouraged and empowered to fully exercise their existing mandates across all three dimensions on important matters where no new consensus decisions are needed – ODIHR to proactively engage with states regarding their human dimension problems and more vigorously address closing civil society space, RFoM to proactively address the issue of propaganda and disinformation, concentration of the media ownership, and the problems related to privately owned social media platforms, HCNM to counter the instrumentalization of ethnic origin in national politics and across borders, CPC to truly open up to civil society input, etc. – and making full use of the knowledge, expertise, and capacities of civil society and cooperation with other relevant actors. The work of different structures of the OSCE should be more actively politically and financially supported based on their existing mandates to assist participating States in their implementation of commitments.

An important element of making the OSCE more effective in the absence of consensus on increasing the unified budget would be for those with sufficient capacity to increase voluntary contributions of financial and human resources (extrabudgetary contributions and secondments). The OSCE is so small in relation to other international organisations that very modest increases by major contributors would greatly increase the OSCE’s capacity to act effectively. Participating States should make further efforts to ensure continuity between Chairpersonships by seconding expert staff to CiOs for longer assignments.

In their turn, CiOs should make better use of the Troika format and consultations with OSCE bodies and civil society to make sure they are ready to work effectively from the very beginning of each year.

A renewed emphasis on accountability of States for upholding the Helsinki principles and their OSCE commitments is an absolute necessity. Upholding OSCE commitments must involve

systematic documentation of violations, support for accountability mechanisms, and investment in civic infrastructure that can help hold states to account.

This can include the frank recognition that no State is perfect, there will always be gaps and shortfalls, combined with agreement that all must strive in good faith to improve their own implementation and to assist each other – with support of OSCE structures and civil society – in overcoming any challenges.

This could also include introduction of more systematic and structured procedures of review of the implementation of OSCE commitments by States as well as taking more consistent follow-up steps by OSCE bodies and participating States after review meetings, release of reports by OSCE bodies and reports in the framework of the human dimension mechanisms, holding of conferences, etc.

This should also include more systematic inclusion of the OSCE commitments not only in the legislation and domestic policies of participating States, ensuring their own respect and better implementation, but also their stronger incorporation in foreign policies of participating States, aimed at ensuring better respect and implementation by other States. This understanding should be embraced not only by delegations of States in Vienna but also by the capitals.

Another practical way to use the OSCE toolbox more effectively is for groups of participating States to employ existing non-consensus mechanisms such as the Vienna and the Moscow mechanisms more consistently and take follow-up steps after the release of the reports to work on implementing their recommendations. If such steps are impossible in the OSCE framework, they should be undertaken in other multilateral settings or in bilateral relations, including for ensuring accountability for violations in international judicial bodies.

Importantly, respect for the OSCE *acquis* and OSCE success should be based on popular demand by citizens – respect, support and ownership of the Helsinki principles by members of the general public. It is the public demand “from below” and monitoring and expertise by civic groups that may lead to better implementation of the OSCE *acquis* by governments – as it was pursued, often successfully, by the civic Helsinki movement in the 1970s-1980s.

For this, the OSCE needs to develop transparent communication to members of the public and its increased visibility to raise awareness of the OSCE work, its aims and successes among citizens of participating States. This should include fostering a better understanding of OSCE relevance, including the notion that comprehensive security based on the Helsinki principles goes beyond the absence of violent conflicts but includes ensuring human security – strengthening democracy, the rule of law, protecting human rights, and promoting social, environmental and economic stability now and for the next generations.

Beyond this, non-state bodies can play a more important role in the Helsinki process by applying comprehensive security principles and approaches in their sphere of influence at the local, regional and national level as well as across borders and in international coalitions and networks. This should be done by civil society, including bodies, which in many countries have a more formal role, such as associations of legal professionals, academic institutions, trade unions, religious bodies, etc.

## 2. EFFECTIVELY REALISING THE COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY CONCEPT

### *Problem statement and analysis*

We recognise the enduring value of the Helsinki Decalogue and efforts by the OSCE, in its norms and its programmes, to deal with security comprehensively. Addressing the human as well as economic and environmental dimensions of security together with politico-military issues has been a critical contribution of the Helsinki process. The notion of comprehensive security, with its human dimension at the forefront, is just as vital today as it was in 1975 when the Helsinki Final Act was signed. Then, it represented a visionary reframing of security – not limited to military balance or geopolitical calculations, but expanded to include respect for human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law as core components of peace and stability. This multidimensional understanding was revolutionary for its time and has only grown in relevance amid today's geopolitical breakdowns, authoritarian resurgence, and global instability.

However, practical implementation of the OSCE foundational concept of comprehensive security has been undermined in the recent years. The collapse of the post-Cold War security order, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the erosion of democratic norms across the OSCE region make it painfully clear that security cannot be achieved through force or statecraft alone. The link between domestic repression and external aggression has become undeniable. The rise of authoritarian regimes, war, normalisation of propaganda and violence, shrinking civic space, climate collapse, and displacement of people cut across borders and show that ignoring the human dimension of security leads not to order, but to catastrophe. Sustainable security must rest on inclusive governance, protection of civic actors, and mechanisms for accountability and trust-building.

Comprehensive security must be reclaimed and reshaped for the current era. This is not only a normative imperative – it is a pragmatic necessity in a world where societal resilience and public engagement are critical to responding to crises, preventing conflict, and rebuilding peace.

Major problems impede effective realisation of the OSCE's comprehensive security concept. Most fundamentally, a number of participating States fail to implement their OSCE commitments across all three dimensions. Russia has grossly violated virtually all the Helsinki principles, most brazenly by launching its full-scale aggression against Ukraine. But many other states regularly violate many human dimension commitments – on human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic governance, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination – as well as second dimension commitments to combat corruption and protect the environment, and some are on the brink of breaching their first dimension commitments by threatening to use force in international relations and violate territorial integrity and sovereignty of other states. Many participating States frequently seek to justify violations or limitations of human rights by citing broad "security" concerns or references to terrorism and extremism, rather than acknowledging that repression, arbitrariness, corruption and poor environmental and climate policies constitute threats to security and stability.

OSCE documents usefully emphasise the comprehensive nature of security, but the OSCE's complex and decentralised structure leads to a compartmentalised approach, which does not contribute in practice to addressing security issues comprehensively. While some specialisation

is desirable and independence of OSCE institutions is essential, we frequently observe that the work of OSCE Secretariat structures and field operations in the politico-military dimension could be more transparent and should more clearly integrate human dimension considerations.

### ***Recommendations***

OSCE structures and participating States should institutionalise a cross-dimensional approach in all OSCE activities to ensure practical implementation of the comprehensive security concept and make consistent efforts to overcome the existing compartmentalisation of the three dimensions.

Work on politico-military security issues, including ongoing programmatic activities and any potential future efforts related to mediation or ceasefire monitoring, should be designed and implemented in consultation with, and with participation of, experts in the human and economic/environmental dimensions of security from both within and outside the OSCE.

Given the increasing use of hybrid practices to undermine stability and security, including through propaganda, disinformation, cyber-attacks, and election interference, OSCE participating States and OSCE structures, including the Representative on Freedom of the Media and ODIHR, should further develop their own toolbox and develop necessary co-operative responses to address these threats comprehensively, consistent with the full range of OSCE principles and commitments.

## **3. ADDRESSING CONCERNS IN THE POLITICO-MILITARY SECURITY DIMENSION: THE ROLE OF OSCE STRUCTURES AND PARTICIPATING STATES**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

We recognise the contribution of the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE commitments to promoting greater stability and providing the agreed Principles that should continue to guide participating States in their politico-military dimension activities. Even in the current unstable environment, dominated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, OSCE bodies such as the Forum for Security Co-operation may contribute to limited transparency and "dialogue" on politico-military issues. Some practical activities of the Conflict Prevention Centre and field operations play a positive role, particularly through exchanges of military information to reduce risks and practical post-conflict programming. Certain first dimension and cross-dimensional activities make positive contributions.

Unfortunately, practical OSCE efforts to address the initial phases of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, including through various mediation formats and the work of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, played only a limited positive role. Neither the commitment of participating States to the Helsinki Principles nor practical OSCE efforts were able to prevent the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, leading to alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. Similarly, while OSCE efforts to resolve protracted conflicts in Moldova and the South Caucasus have at times played stabilising roles, these have not yielded sustainable results and did not prevent the use of force by Russia against Georgia in 2008 or by Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, leading to civilian casualties, enforced disappearances, ethnic cleansing, and massive displacement of populations.

We find the work of OSCE structures and dialogue forums largely ineffective in promoting peace and stability among participating States. Shortcomings and failures should not be attributed to weaknesses in the OSCE *acquis* or to international civil servants and diplomats, but rather to the policies of participating States and their unwillingness to find peaceful solutions to political or territorial disputes.

Since MC Decision 3/11, the OSCE bodies mandated to work on conflicts, including the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) and field operations, have made considerable progress in developing various instruments, toolboxes, trainings, and guidelines to make the OSCE's work along the conflict cycle more effective. An array of different bodies and processes in the OSCE deals with these issues; however, their impact on actions and policies of participating States has been very limited. The OSCE and its executive bodies cannot make full use of their mandates and capacities due to a lack of political will of participating States to make proactive use of relevant instruments and a constant decrease of the Organisation's unified budget, which constrains its ability to respond to emerging tensions and address root causes of conflicts. The biggest problem with the OSCE security/conflict cycle toolbox is that participating States do not use it in earnest. Even if diplomats in Vienna are aware of the toolbox and see its value, decision-makers in the capitals do not apply it.

The CPC's Situation/Communication room has a key early warning relevance for monitoring developments in all 57 participating States. However, the CPS personnel and budget are insufficient and do not ensure that it disposes of analytical capacities to cover all relevant developments throughout the OSCE area. The CPC's Mediation Support Team is an OSCE-wide focal point for dialogue facilitation and mediation support, but it lacks resources to cover the current demands and to assist field missions enhance peace and stability over the long term.

While field operations serve as a key tool in OSCE conflict work, they are often understaffed, some of them lack a clear mandate on conflict work, experience pressure from host governments, and do not effectively interact with independent civil society. Moreover, field operations are not present in many participating States, falling victim to positions of participating States involved in conflicts, which take advantage of the consensus rule and block extension of field operations' mandates, their budgets and staff capacities. A monitoring mission such as the SMM cannot be effective when conflict parties impose restrictions on its operations and prevent effective fulfilment of its mandate.

Dealing with conflicts in the OSCE is increasingly driven by the desire to overcome growing divisions among participating States and engage political leaders on both sides of the divide in dialogue. As a result, the focus on conflict management is more than ever narrowed down to mediation among political leaders rather than participation of a broad range of actors to address the root causes of conflicts. Such "engagement at any cost" makes all parties involved hostages of political bargaining and focuses on "negative peace" to the detriment of building durable "positive peace".

Propaganda, disinformation and hate speech have a serious negative impact on the security and sovereignty of states. They are also a big detrimental factor for freedom of the media by undermining credibility of the media and often being accompanied by wiping out independent media by the authorities to make propaganda work more successfully.

## **Recommendations**

The current challenging situation requires reconceptualising the OSCE's role in the security field. In their discussions on re-building security architecture in the OSCE region, OSCE structures and participating States should formulate more clearly what the nature of the OSCE work in conflict resolution, peace building, and more broadly in the politico-military security field should be, what its main value in the current challenging context is, and then prioritise the identified goals and activities.

OSCE structures should also discuss involvement of different international and national actors in efforts to rebuild security architecture in the OSCE region and consider OSCE's coordinating and monitoring role in this process. The OSCE can play an important role as a platform for negotiating, implementing or controlling implementation of agreements achieved elsewhere, including agreements to end Russian aggression against Ukraine. This might be the most practical way forward to ensure the Organisation's relevance in the new security situation.

If a peace agreement is concluded to stop the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the OSCE potential and expertise should be utilised to the maximum extent possible to ensure sustainable peace, including using the OSCE as a platform to conduct negotiations on arms control and confidence-building measures, elaborate new security norms or improve the existing ones, assist in implementing post-negotiations arrangements and monitor their implementation, send monitoring and fact-finding missions, facilitate peace-building dialogue, etc. Monitoring and early warning should be done not only in Ukraine and Russia, but also in Belarus as the state complicit in the aggression.

OSCE structures and participating States should consider different scenarios of the OSCE future, reflecting on experiences of what the OSCE was able to achieve in different periods in the past and depending on geopolitical developments, first and foremost on how the full-scale invasion of Ukraine will end and on how relations between Russia and the West will develop; acknowledge that the OSCE has a role to play in the future even in the worst case scenario; be prepared for different scenarios and have concrete plans for their implementation.

Participating States and OSCE structures should place respect for international law at the core of all conversations and decisions related to re-building security architecture in the OSCE region, including the Helsinki principles and the UN charter norms on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, prohibition of the use of force or threat thereof, the concept of comprehensive security, respect for norms of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

They should ensure that all programmatic activities within OSCE conflict-related work integrate a strong human rights focus. This requirement should be implemented in the work on different conflict and post-conflict situations, including the Transnistrian region of Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia, as well as in support of ongoing peacebuilding efforts between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

OSCE/ODIHR needs to have better rapid response/standby capacity in order to deal with emergencies and crisis situations, such as sending human dimension assessment missions. This includes relevant budgets for rapid response that could be used throughout the year.

A stronger leadership role of the Chairpersonship is required when the first warning signs of a conflict and/or an unfolding human dimension crisis are detected. The Chairpersonship must make active use of the CPC's early warning functions, supporting the Secretary General and the CPC to carry out their early warning mandate. In cases when the political-military security dimension or the human dimension situation deteriorates and access to the country is limited or absent, a Chairpersonship action should be taken, including in the form of a Chairpersonship-commissioned report.

The Secretary General should more effectively use his/her mandate for early warning action on the basis of the MC Decision 3/11, including by making more regular early warning reports to the Permanent Council to enable participating States to engage early on emerging trends. Early warning by the Secretary General should be implemented in a way that keeps the door open for constructive engagement.

Participating States and OSCE structures should also strengthen responses to hybrid non-military security threats, more actively addressing instruments such as propaganda and disinformation, cyberattacks, and artificially induced migration crises at borders. States that are targeted by such hybrid instruments should consider invoking the Moscow Mechanism in respect of the situation in their countries and ask for assistance. Other States should consider invoking the Vienna Mechanism and ask the targeted states questions that would help them to highlight the problem and receive assistance.

The work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) to address propaganda, disinformation and hate speech should be activated, considering the huge role these malign tools now play in preparing and justifying conflicts, wars, and war crimes, and indoctrinating the public. More active work is needed, with more conclusive recommendations and guidelines and more visible input. RFoM should cooperate more actively in this field with other intergovernmental organisations, which have had progress in adopting their norms and regulations to address this problem, such as the EU and the Council of Europe; develop recommendations on addressing the problem, especially in the context of the functioning of online platforms; promote the idea of developing international guidelines on the principles of countering propaganda and disinformation while protecting freedom of expression; work with civil society by investing in education of the public, explaining the dangerous impact of propagandistic and disinformation narratives, promoting critical thinking and media literacy, and fostering community dialogue; address the lack of information security and sovereignty in Europe in the context of functioning of global online platforms as information emergency; develop internal procedures on more effective RFoM engagement with civil society and expand the circle of civil society partners, going beyond the usual circle mostly limited to media freedom NGO to involve other NGOs and civic groups that could be RFoM's allies in the efforts to combat propaganda and disinformation.

OSCE structures and participating States should more actively support monitoring missions in conflict-affected areas and more actively use the Moscow Mechanism when early warning signs are detected. In states and regions where the OSCE has no field operations, but where a potential

of conflict revival exists, other OSCE instruments, such as fact-finding missions, should be actively used. When the OSCE is prevented by States from sending a monitoring mission, its bodies should be more actively engaged in distant monitoring and regularly use civil society documentation.

OSCE structures, including field operations, should consider shifting the OSCE role from engaging in track two and track three diplomacy processes in conflict situations to high-level political engagement, leaving tracks two and three to international, national and local NGOs and supporting them in these efforts, rather than competing with them.

The problem of prisoners of war and illegally detained civilians persists in a number of conflicts, such as in the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the wars in Nagorno Karabakh. Human security and the “people first” principle should be embedded in all conflict resolution efforts.

Protracted displacement of people continues to be one of the roots of conflict revival. The needs and priorities of people in the situation of protracted displacement and of people living on conflict-affected territories should be addressed as a matter of priority. They should be supported as important participants of post-conflict reconstruction, conflict transformation and reconciliation.

Building durable peace after the end of hostilities is not possible without truth, justice for the victims, and ending impunity of the perpetrators, including accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Impunity breeds new crimes, new aggression, and therefore there is limited preventive value of peace arrangements that lack the transitional justice component. OSCE structures and participating States should aim at attaining sustainable peace as a way to end Russian aggression against Ukraine as well as other conflicts, as opposed to merely arranging a ceasefire.

Developing infrastructure for peace requires a shift from “negative peace” (no violence) to positive peace (rule of law, protection of human rights, strong democratic institutions, social cohesion, resilience to violence, etc.). States should support the approach by the CPC and field missions that links the short-term conflict prevention with the long-term structural one and addresses the root causes of conflicts. Improvement in human security is the best investment in conflict prevention, as it creates pre-conditions for peaceful conflict transformation. Post-conflict transformation should not be left to field missions alone as their ability to act is limited by their mandates, resources, and pressure from states; civil society has to play a more prominent role.

Relevant OSCE bodies should develop a post-conflict transformation framework and strategy for each conflict region, based on social, political and other characteristics of the situation and engage civil society in drafting such strategies. They should include not only the building of democratic institutions, good governance and rule of law, but also cover broad post-conflict dialogue in the society, de-construction of stereotypes, combating propaganda, enhancing culture of remembrance and critical reflection, including through cultural activities, formal and informal educational programmes.



#### **4. ADDRESSING CONCERNS IN THE POLITICO-MILITARY SECURITY DIMENSION: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

##### ***Problem statement and analysis***

Civil society remains an untapped potential in the OSCE's work in the politico-military dimension, including its work on the conflict cycle. While some OSCE bodies involved in conflict-related work strive to engage with civil society actors, these efforts are not sufficient: civil society expertise and information are not used effectively, and necessary information is often not provided to them.

While civil society is well integrated in the human dimension, there is no formal mandate for OSCE politico-military forums and structures to be open to civil society. Non-governmental actors are often excluded from such OSCE forums or included very selectively, with invitations often limited to academic and think-tank experts rather than civil society actors. Definitions of what civil society is vary in the OSCE: experts from think tanks and academic institutions dominate politico-military spaces, while NGOs and grassroots groups are considered "activists" and are confined to participation in the human dimension activities. This inconsistency limits inclusive dialogue and decision-making in the first dimension. Yet civil society – especially from conflict-affected regions – offers expertise in the situation on the ground, early warning capacity, and legitimacy among the affected populations.

Civil society would be able to contribute much more in addressing conflicts if it was provided with early warning indicators, receive technical support and capacity building in collecting information on early warning indicators, systematically consulted by the Special Representatives on mediation in particular conflict situations, and actively involved by field operations in designing, implementing and evaluating dialogue programmes.

In spite of guidelines and agreements and commitment of the relevant bodies and individuals, the OSCE system of working on conflicts often appears non-transparent for civil society, having no entry points for information and cooperation, and slow, especially when rapid response is required. Acknowledging the sensitive nature of the work of the CPC and the "quiet diplomacy" conducted by the HCNM, greater transparency in their conflict prevention work and better communication with civil society beyond the limited circle of their regular sources is necessary. Information on early warning signs from broader civil society does not reach the CPC and the HCNM in a systematic manner as there are currently no effective mechanisms in place for civil society to forward relevant information.

While civil society's ability to act during the acute stage of a conflict is limited, it can make a strong contribution to transitional justice by documenting violations of international humanitarian law and thus fight impunity and help to prevent new conflicts. Documentation by civil society may be used in legal and truth finding processes, help to provide legal representation to and rehabilitation of victims of conflict, and be used to counter divisive narratives spread by parties to the conflict.

The role of civil society is especially crucial in the current situation in which historical prejudice, enemy images, and xenophobic narratives are again on the rise in many countries due to the surge of nationalistic and populist forces who manipulate public opinion and increase tensions. Civil society could play a stronger role in mobilising the public against hate speech, divisive narratives

and nationalistic sentiments propagated by political leaders in their power interests and preventing some parts of (un)civil society from contributing to these negative developments.

Since parties to many conflicts are so entrenched, it is often difficult to change the nature of the conflict. Therefore, the role of civil society in conflict resolution is ever more important. However, negotiations and mediation efforts, including those in the OSCE framework, do not involve civil society, contrary to best practices. Dialogues between political actors taking place in the conflict settlement formats are closed to and distanced from civil society and affected communities.

Human rights defenders, peacebuilders, including women and youth, play a particularly important role in peacebuilding by being active in the protection of civilians against violence, monitoring human rights violations and the implementation of peace agreements, advocacy for peace and human rights, socialisation to values of peace and democracy as well as development of the in-group identity of marginalised groups, building inter-group social cohesion by bringing people together from adversarial groups, facilitation of dialogue on the local and national level and beyond borders, and creating caring economy which helps to create entry points for all of the above elements of peacebuilding.

### ***Recommendations***

OSCE structures and participating States should create spaces and processes for systematically including civil society in meetings and discussions in the first dimension of the OSCE. They should actively use the untapped potential of civil society's work in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace-building, and post-conflict rehabilitation and make use of relevant civil society documents and recommendations in the field of security and working on conflict, including the 2020 Stockholm Declaration and the documents of the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process.

OSCE structures and participating States should institutionalise broad and meaningful civil society participation from both research and practice fields in dialogues in the politico-military dimension, moving beyond invitations to think tanks or academic institutions and ensuring the inclusion of a broad range of CSOs and grassroots organisations from conflict-affected regions. OSCE structures and participating States should ensure that civil society representatives play an active role in the ongoing discussions on re-building security in the OSCE region.

Coordination, communication, and cooperation of the OSCE with civil society regarding early warning, monitoring, conflict resolution, mediation, transitional justice, and peacebuilding should be enhanced, including by the establishment of communication platforms and mechanisms for each specific conflict or crisis in participating States with and without OSCE field missions. Therefore, OSCE structures and participating States must institutionalise broad and cross-dimensional engagement to fully benefit from civil society's contribution. This should include the development of regular and secure mechanisms for civil society contributions and systematic use of civil society input in conflict-related decision-making.

The OSCE should establish a structured mechanism for civil society to contribute to its early warning systems. Enabling civil society input into the OSCE's Network of Early Warning Focal Points and the CPC SitRoom would strengthen the OSCE's ability to act before conflicts escalate.

The Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) could contribute to addressing this gap by:

- setting up an effective communication channel with civil society, aimed at developing a more structured exchange on a regular basis between CSOs and the CPC. A first step could be designating a civil society liaison, so that communication is not spread in a way that you have to go from one geographic desk to another and deal with every issue with another person;
- expanding a circle of CPC's civil society partners both on the local and OSCE-wide level;
- considering changing the status of early warning indicators from an internal OSCE document to a public one to allow it to be shared with civil society to ensure a better flow of information;
- organising dialogue with civil society on OSCE early warning methodology and on how CSOs can best contribute to it, possibly leading to the establishment of a more formalised cooperation; developing guidelines for CSOs on effective provision of relevant information to the OSCE, specifically as regards early warning information and early action recommendations; holding trainings for CSOs on early warning methodologies;
- considering using the experience of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department as a model for ensuring effective input from civil society through a portal where they collect information for its reports; with a template for reporting by CSOs, where they could upload information in a structured and safe way.

A human dimension crisis should serve as a key warning sign for a political-military security crisis. It requires an early response before it escalates into an armed conflict. CSOs gave warnings on these early signs in many conflicts, but their voice has not been heard. In its turn, shrinking civic space is an early warning sign of instability but remains insufficiently recognised as a security issue. OSCE structures and participating States should consider suppression of civil society activities as an early warning indicator that may be part of a process leading to a human dimension crisis and further to a security breach at the international level. They should expand efforts to strengthen civil society, oppose restrictive policies and legislation, and protect the persecuted activists as part of the OSCE work to ensure comprehensive security and prevent conflicts.

Relevant OSCE structures should ensure more effective civil society involvement in all stages of mediation and negotiation processes, including women and affected communities. In particular, they should address the problem of the lack of transparency in selecting civil society representatives for consultations with Special Representatives on particular conflicts before a round of official mediation or negotiation processes takes place; create an opportunity for CSOs to proactively request to be involved in such consultation processes; apart from the consultations of Special Representatives on particular conflicts with civil society before a round of official talks, hold debriefings by the Special Representative after the talks; work towards providing a role for civil society in the international Geneva dialogues on conflicts in Georgia.

Chairpersonships and participating States should support the creation of a permanent, full-time position of the Special Representative on Civil Society with sufficient resources and an extended mandate to facilitate civil society's meaningful engagement in OSCE's conflict-related work.

## **5. ENSURING EFFECTIVE ADDRESSING OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY CONCERNS BY THE OSCE**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

We recognise the centrality of environmental concerns to the Helsinki process from its outset. OSCE participating States have made significant decisions with regard to the environment over time, underscoring the importance of the issue to the OSCE and efforts to incorporate environmental and climate change security concerns into relevant decision-making processes.

The OSCE has created institutional support to address environmental and climate concerns, including through Aarhus Centres throughout the OSCE region. Aarhus Centres are vital tools for collecting and disseminating environmental information, yet many face significant challenges or are not as active as they could be. They can serve as repositories of information, coordination points for activities, and focal points for inclusion of civil society in more important ways.

The OSCE has also made important efforts to incorporate gender, migration, conflict, and other key issues that address the intersectional nature of environmental and climate concerns. Broadening the understanding of comprehensive security to include these complex and interrelated issues is critical to understanding and addressing the threats facing the OSCE participating States and our societies, and the scope, depth, and breadth of those threats.

Civil society groups and local community members are invaluable sources of data on climate related issues including emissions, resource use, and regional solutions. At the same time, attacks on environmental defenders by state and private actors are increasing, and their security is increasingly threatened. Inclusion of civil society into solutions to address the enormous environmental and climate security challenges we face has been insufficient in the OSCE to date. Similarly, local efforts to address climate change in particular, but also environmental issues, have not played a central enough role in the work of OSCE participating States.

Insufficient resources are available to address the multitude of environmental and climate challenges, including an absence of political will. Although recent OSCE Chairpersonships have placed environment and climate at the forefront of concerns, which is an important and valued step, we need greater institutional capacity to address environmental and climate concerns, in all their complexity, as they will only grow in the coming years.

### ***Recommendations***

The OSCE should place environmental security and the climate crisis much higher on the OSCE agenda, substantially activate work in this field and support these efforts by providing the necessary resources.

Building on existing commitments, the OSCE should broaden its concept of environmental security and the climate crisis to highlight and better incorporate into its activities and programming the intersectional and interdimensional nature of the issue, including impacts on migration, gender, minorities, Indigenous rights, conflict, and transboundary issues.

The OSCE should conduct a more comprehensive annual review of participating States' records on implementing their second dimension commitments and involve civil society in this effort. By facilitating transparent reviews and accountability mechanisms, the OSCE can ensure that commitments translate into tangible progress, countering tendencies to neglect or backslide.

Participating States should address the weaponisation of environmental damage and disasters during violent conflict, such as in the course of the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine, study documentation by civil society organisations, and focus on using legal instruments to bring perpetrators to account and ensure justice to victims.

The OSCE should establish the position of a Rapporteur on Security of Environmental and Climate Defenders or include this problem in the mandate of the CiO Special Representative on Civil Society. For its part, ODIHR should include the situation of environmental and climate defenders in its monitoring of and reporting on security of human rights defenders. Much as the United Nations has expanded its human rights mandate to include security of environmental and climate defenders, the OSCE should establish a similar mandate.

Relevant OSCE bodies, such as the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities within the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Economic and Environmental Committee should create more opportunities for input from civil society, invite civil society experts and members of affected communities to speak at their meetings, and include their representatives in monitoring, reporting, analysis, deliberations and program development, implementation and assessment.

Civil society should be much more vigorously included in OSCE work on environmental security and climate change to ensure that climate and environmental programmes of OSCE bodies and participating States use the data they collect and solutions they propose as well as help the people and communities that need support the most. The Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and OSCE field operations should be activated in more substantial ways to engage with national and local civil society and local communities in OSCE participating States. This engagement should utilise the resources of the Aarhus Centre Network with its more than 30 centres in all four OSCE sub-regions. The OSCE should support strengthening these centres by providing logistical support and working with governments to remove bureaucratic or political obstacles. These centres can play a critical role in enhancing public awareness and facilitating access to environmental data.

The OSCE should strengthen capacity building for civil society organisations working on environmental and climate issues, similar to its support for human rights organisations. It should offer in-person and online trainings and financial support for local environmental initiatives. Participating States should consider establishing a dedicated fund for supporting long-term research and data collection by civil society and research organisations.

## **6. ADOPTING A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE TO SECURITY**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

Women have a specific approach to all three interlinked dimensions of the OSCE, based on their long-term feminist conflict analysis and complex understanding of safety, equality and justice. The intersectional understanding of how societies can and should function more peacefully, leaving no one behind, is rooted in women's living experiences on the ground. A gendered lens is of utmost importance for the future of the OSCE, reflecting on the understanding that human security is a central part of common security. This perspective requires a cross-dimensional institutionalised approach.

Discussions on the future of the Helsinki process must not only reaffirm its foundational principles but also modernise them to meet contemporary security challenges. This includes a better understanding that a feminist, intersectional, and human-centred approach is essential for building sustainable peace, human security, and gender equality. They are essential for social well-being, environmental sustainability, and the protection of future generations. An exclusive focus on the military dimension of security and the increasing militarisation of conflicts, alongside shrinking space for civil society, undermine peace processes.

In the OSCE, there is a deficit of gender analysis of underlying root causes of conflict and violence, which has a strong impact on the protection and participation of women and marginalised groups as change makers and actors in a preventive approach. Gender sensitive conflict analysis, including differential impact of conflict, needs to be developed in the OSCE. Active involvement of women in the work on realising the comprehensive security concept, especially conflict-affected women, and their networks, should be safeguarded.

Women are key actors against radicalisation and violent extremism and all forms of discrimination, not necessarily as mothers but as persons and legal subjects with voice and power to act. Women are also key actors in post-conflict rehabilitation, formulating post-conflict transition, trauma healing, and transitional justice measures. A priority goal across the OSCE region must be to develop concrete mechanisms which will increase women's participation at all levels of decision making and negotiation.

Research consistently shows that peace agreements, diplomacy, and negotiations are more effective when women and grassroots organisations are meaningfully included. Gender sensitive information is crucial to early warning systems and can reveal otherwise unseen conflict drivers and triggers. To implement the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, calling for increased roles for women in conflict prevention, the OSCE's conflict early warning systems must be strengthened profoundly with regard to gender issues. While OSCE bodies are well aware of gender implications, just like other international organisations, the OSCE struggles to integrate them effectively into early warning analysis from a conceptual point of view.

### ***Recommendations***

OSCE structures and participating States should leverage feminist expertise in sustainable peacebuilding in the cross-dimensional approach, recognising that:

- cross-dimensional approach to security and peacebuilding should be prioritised;
- security has a strong economic dimension – women, as primary caregivers, play a crucial role in peacebuilding;
- context-specific confidence-building measures should be expanded, with greater recognition of care initiatives as integral to peace efforts;
- the role of women-led civil society in shaping peace processes should be elevated;
- democratic space for inclusive and participatory dialogue, ensuring gender-sensitive peacebuilding at all levels, should be provided, including at the community level (strengthening solidarity, reconciliation, and anti-discrimination initiatives), the regional level (supporting cross-border cooperation, education, and women’s leadership in peacebuilding), and the multilateral level (creating meaningful spaces for civil society participation in the OSCE’s first dimension, ensuring that women’s voices are at the core of security dialogues).

*In the politico-military dimension:*

- embed gender equality in the OSCE comprehensive security framework to ensure women’s active participation in peacebuilding mechanisms within the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework;
- open OSCE structures to greater civil society participation, integrating intersectional feminist perspectives into decision-making and utilising the women’s movement’s expertise to define alternatives to the massive militarisation of conflicts. OSCE institutions and participating States should work with each other and other international actors towards full implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda and OSCE Gender Action Plan and ensure meaningful engagement of women’s organisations in all stages of conflict resolution and peacebuilding;
- establish systematic channels to provide reports and gender-sensitive (early) warnings to OSCE bodies, such as the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and provide timely feedback and actions;
- initiate regular consultations about peace building efforts on the ground and chances for conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, needed for sustainable livelihood and (women’s) safety; start planning for early recovery, resistance;
- increase efforts to implement arms control, disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation, with a strong focus on curbing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons;
- pay specific attention to returning combatants, the challenge of separated families, and trainings for dealing with the past;
- invest in specific humanitarian efforts, including care and assistance for the most vulnerable and displaced people, with a specific focus on the situation of women;
- increase investment in training programs, workshops, and informal dialogue spaces that empower local women as key actors in early warning and crisis management and bolster their management capacity.

*In the economic and environmental dimension:*

- pay more attention to gender transformative approaches (GTA) in changing discriminatory structures, norms and power dynamics, given deep-rooted inequalities in social and cultural norms;
- in times of economic crises and social cuts, invest more in analysing financial flows in war times, paying specific attention to equal access to resources to cover basic needs in local communities and promoting local initiatives of gender responsive budgeting;
- assure public and private investments in promoting peace and peaceful conflict resolution. Foster the understanding of peace processes.
- centre women’s meaningful participation around care: invest in a critical study of the social, ecological, and economic impacts of military spending and activity;
- recognise that climate challenges are underestimated, disproportionately affecting women’s lives and freedoms.

*In the human dimension:*

- integrate systematically an intersectional feminist perspective on all levels to counter specific and gender based human rights violations;
- ensure accountability for human (women’s) rights violations by tackling patriarchal dominance and militarised masculinities in political and social systems as well as by implementing anti-discrimination measures;
- invest in empowerment, encouraging women and other marginalised groups to take up positions of social and political influence, enabling them to participate meaningfully and representatively in critical decision-making processes in short term electoral terms and in the long term for a more equal society;
- pay particular attention to early warning signals and promote early action based on the knowledge and the relationships of women on the ground – also to tackle violent extremism in an early stage.
- develop and support intergenerational frameworks for addressing propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech that fuel (gendered) conflicts. Support civil society to promote critical thinking and foster inter-community and regionally based dialogue.
- Prosecute and sanction gender-based aggression and all forms of sexually based violence at local, regional, national and multilateral levels.

## **7. EXPANDING CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OSCE AND PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE: WHAT THE OSCE STRUCTURES AND PARTICIPATING STATES CAN DO**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

The history of the OSCE and a part of its ethos are closely linked to civil society engagement, as joint efforts of the Helsinki groups from various regions together with government actors shaped the initial stages of the Helsinki process. Although today a range of opportunities for civil society organisations (CSOs) to participate in various OSCE meetings remains, there is no mechanism for them to affect OSCE policies and decision-making. Individual parts of the OSCE may initiate contacts with CSOs and involve them in various activities, but there is no coherent and comprehensive policy on citizen engagement. There is also an obvious gap between participation



in OSCE meetings or various modes of expert involvement, on the one hand, and influence on both operational and political level of the organisation, on the other. Citizens' participation in the OSCE remains largely symbolic and is limited to the lower forms of engagement, while upper stages of participation are completely out of reach.

In seeking a meaningful engagement with and influence on OSCE structures, civil society stumbles on the reality that declarations about participation are not backed by relevant policies and procedures, funding, professional incentives, and training and skill development for CSOs. This needs to change if there is a genuine interest in promoting the Helsinki principles and not just declaring them.

As there exists quite a variety of avenues for interaction between CSOs and OSCE bodies, the problem preventing the development of more meaningful and impactful engagement is not the lack of entry points but a lack of political will. Moreover, the abuse of the consensus rule by some participating States and pressure by autocratic governments on the work of field operations add to the problem.

While the format of the annual OSCE human dimension conferences allows for more side events by CSOs and more time for civil society interaction with delegations, many of these engagements have mostly a symbolic nature, with limited substantive reaction to civil society proposals and no follow-up.

Similarly, the Civil Society Parallel Conference on the eve of the annual Ministerial Council meeting has become largely a symbolic act, since substantive reaction to the analysis and recommendations presented by civil society and a follow up by key actors remain very limited if not absent. The same applies to interactions on the margins of the Ministerial Council meeting, where civil society representatives participate as observers. A number of meetings of delegations of States with civil society on the margins of the Ministerial Council meeting has dramatically decreased, compared to just a few years ago.

One of the ways to avoid existing challenges in expanding civil society engagement with the OSCE is stimulating interaction with informal working bodies of participating States, which allow for focused work on problematic issues. One of the good practices in this regard has been participation of civil society experts in the work of the Human Dimension Committee. Another one is Chairpersonship consultations with civil society on relevant topics considered a priority by the CiO and CSOs.

Establishing a mandate and appointment of the Special Representative of the CiO on Civil Society under the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia in 2023 and continuation of this practice by Malta in 2024 and Finland in 2025 has been an important step forward. However, this mandate needs shaping of more concrete content, developed tools, necessary resources, and cooperation with the Special Representative by OSCE bodies and participating States.

The way forward in the present challenging conditions might be a stronger political will, which would give enough courage to Chairpersonships, other OSCE bodies, and participating States to take bold steps and seek creative solutions that do not require consensus decisions by all participating States.

There are at least two main reasons why the OSCE should be actively involved in efforts to protect civil society space. First, the OSCE *acquis* includes a number of specific commitments related to free and unobstructed work of civil society, including some unique ones, having no analogues in other intergovernmental frameworks, such as special guarantees on freedom of movement for NGO representatives/human rights defenders involved in cross-border monitoring of human dimension conditions in participating States. Second, recognition of civil society actors as natural allies in upholding the Helsinki principles implies a necessity to protect them from harassment and reprisals and create favourable conditions for their work.

In the context of the rapidly deteriorating situation of civic space in many participating States, severely limited resources and its lack of political leverage, the OSCE cannot effectively react to all the threats to civil society in the region and inevitably has to prioritise.

OSCE structures and participating States have at their disposal an extensive set of tools for protecting civil society space, such as including this goal in Chairpersonship priorities, invoking the Moscow and the Vienna mechanisms specifically in respect of situations when civil society is under attack, issuing joint statements, using country visits by the Secretary General to raise questions related to persecution of civic activists with the authorities, adoption of resolutions by the Parliamentary Assembly, etc. However, these tools could be used more effectively, strategically, and in a certain sequence. Relevant efforts by various OSCE stakeholders need to be better coordinated and streamlined.

### **Recommendations**

OSCE structures and participating States should analyse the existing and potential avenues for civil society engagement in the implementation of the Helsinki principles and consider strengthening these mechanisms and developing new ones that would include not only symbolic recognition of importance of the work of CSOs, but would be based on treating them as partners in deliberations, drafting of documents and the development and implementation of programmes and activities.

Chairpersonships, including the incoming Swiss Chairpersonship 2026, should:

- establish and implement formats of regular consultations with civil society on topics considered a priority before the assumption of the Chairpersonship and throughout the year;
- actively involve civil society in the implementation of its priorities in all three dimensions and in the work on strengthening the OSCE's ability to act;
- provide practical support in opening the first and the second OSCE dimensions to broader and meaningful civil society engagement;
- play a leading role in placing the problem of shrinking civil society space and persecution of human rights defenders and other civil society representatives much higher on the OSCE agenda and developing a system of reacting to repressive laws and policies restricting civil society space and cases of persecution of human rights defenders and other civic activists and CSOs;
- extend annually the mandate of the Special Representative of the CiO on Civil Society, appoint a prominent figure to this position, consider tasking the mandate holder with

acting as a focal point between OSCE bodies and institutions on matters of civil society participation in the OSCE work and the protection of civil society space across the OSCE region, fill the mandate with concrete content and tools, and allocate necessary financial and administrative resources.

The chairpersonship, institutions and participating States, including States chairing committees and forums in all three dimensions, should ensure space for presentation of civil society analysis and recommendations and provide substantive reaction and a follow up to them.

OSCE participating States should:

- establish an informal “group of friends of civil society” to focus on developing joint strategies on reversing the backlash against civil society, expanding civil society space in the OSCE region, and enhancing meaningful civil society participation in OSCE work;
- overcome the symbolic nature of meetings with CSO representatives on the margins of human dimension events, Parallel Conferences and Ministerial Council meetings by turning them into a joint process of reflection and planning;
- establish a fund for supporting civil society’s work on the implementation of the Helsinki principles and its meaningful engagement in OSCE work on a sustainable and predictable basis.

Chairpersonship, institutions and participating States should:

- put the problem of shrinking civil society space and persecution of human rights defenders and other civil society representatives much higher on the OSCE agenda;
- regard reprisals against civil society actors for cooperation with the OSCE as an attack on the OSCE itself and its concept of comprehensive security;
- develop and put to work a system of reacting to repressive laws and policies restricting civil society space and cases of persecution of human rights defenders and other civic activists and CSOs, with a clear “division of labour” between relevant OSCE bodies and institutions;
- adopt and implement a special mechanism of quick reaction to reprisals against CSOs and activists for their cooperation with the OSCE;
- focus their protective efforts on those civil society actors which are directly involved in or contribute to OSCE’s programs and activities, those working in the areas affected by conflicts, and those who are involved in cross-border monitoring of human rights.

OSCE/ODIHR should:

- expand its engagement with civil society and more efficiently utilise civil society expertise by activating its existing panels of experts and establishing new ones, such as the panel of experts on torture prevention, advocated by civil society for a long time;
- consider activating its work on securing civil society space by developing a system of indicators on the freedom of association and security of human rights defenders, holding systematic monitoring of the situation in participating States, producing regular and ad hoc reports;

- consider updating the existing Guidelines on security of human rights defenders (2014) and Guidelines on freedom of association (2015), and involve civil society experts in this process;
- reinstate a dedicated ‘focal point on human rights defenders’ and publicly disseminate the information about it and its contacts.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should:

- organise special events on the issue of protecting civil society space and persecution of civic activists and encourage its members to bring these discussions to their national parliaments;
- develop a clearer mandate for its Special Representative on Civil Society to maximise its impact and ensure synergy with the CiO Special Representative on Civil Society; support this mandate, provide it with resources and appoint an authoritative parliamentarian to this position;
- look into how its Special Representative on Political Prisoners could contribute to addressing the situation of imprisoned human rights defenders and other civil society activists.

## **8. EXPANDING CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OSCE: WHAT CIVIL SOCIETY CAN DO**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

In order to expand civil society engagement with the OSCE and make it more meaningful, special efforts are needed not only on the part of the OSCE structures and States, but also by civil society itself.

The level of interest and participation among civil society in the OSCE could be significantly higher. Many civil society representatives engaging with the OSCE for many years have been discouraged by the lack of practical impact of this engagement on the way the OSCE works and on the real situation of human security in their countries and the OSCE region. Others choose not to engage with the organisation in the first place, focusing their efforts on other intergovernmental frameworks that are seen as more resourceful, effective and impactful. The third category of civil society actors are simply unaware of the various aspects of the OSCE work that may be important for their goals and of the existing engagement opportunities. CSOs regularly and systematically interacting with the OSCE structures have developed into quite an “elite” community. Special efforts are needed to convince wider circles of civil society to start looking at the OSCE as a target of their advocacy, their interlocutor and potential partner.

An immediate consequence of genuine civil society abandoning OSCE spaces is that this void is filled by GONGOs supporting (or representing a position of) authoritarian states as well as groups promoting conservative anti-human rights agenda.

Civil society actors continuing to actively engage with the OSCE, including the Civic Solidarity Platform and its members, should reflect on what they are actually bringing to the table (is it only the professional expertise that they can offer, or can they also represent wider public interests?), strive to mobilise wider support among their societies, and start building new alliances, also with

organisations and people that one does not think of first, as well as in countries and regions beyond the OSCE as such.

The modern Helsinki movement needs to re-think and re-shape itself in accordance with the current challenges in order to build muscles and change the existing balance of power. Engaging many more people in work with the OSCE – from both organised civil society groups and a broader spectrum of social actors – will potentially allow the Organisation to increase its influence.

### ***Recommendations***

In order to develop more effective and meaningful engagement in the OSCE work, civil society should:

- not abandon civil society’s work with the OSCE due to its ineffectiveness and the current institutional crisis, but direct efforts to preserve and expand the existing opportunities for civil society engagement in OSCE work and make them more effective along with continuing developing proposals on modernising the Organisation and advocating for making it more fit to respond to multiple international crises and its own institutional challenges;
- assess the need to rebuild the previously existing but currently unavailable avenues for participation of civil society in OSCE work;
- be strategic in choosing where civil society has to engage to achieve the best results; evaluate effectiveness of existing and potential mechanisms of civil society engagement in OSCE work from the perspective of civil society’s ability to influence political, programmatic and operational level of the Organisation;
- develop and promote concrete recommendations and guidelines for OSCE bodies, institutions and participating States on effective engagement with civil society;
- follow and understand internal OSCE politics, stay updated on the current debates and the angles from which various OSCE actors approach key and often divisive issues; try to find common language to discuss these issues and build cooperation with various actors;
- try to proactively identify allies among representatives of OSCE structures and delegations of participating States, understand their concerns and possibilities, discuss issues of common interest, cultivate relations and build trust with them through dialogue and cooperation;
- focus on active interaction with informal working bodies of participating States as an effective way of expanding civil society engagement in OSCE work allowing to overcome the problem of the abuse of consensus decision-making rules;
- advocate more actively for the establishment of an informal “group of friends of civil society” comprised of delegations of supportive participating States;
- advocate for holding regular Chairpersonship consultations with civil society on relevant topics considered a priority by the Chairpersonship and CSOs before the assumption of the Chairpersonship and throughout the year; bring concrete ideas and proposals there;
- make consistent efforts to overcome civil society’s artificial confinement to the third dimension with its systematic exclusion from the first and second dimensions as well as

branding of CSO representatives as “activists” with limited expertise as opposed to “experts” from think-tanks and academic institutions; more actively participate in the activities and meetings in the first and second dimensions, focusing on the work on conflicts, hybrid threats, climate crisis, countering transborder corruption, etc.; develop an OSCE-wide strategy for civil society integration across all three dimensions;

- strive to build up and exercise civic agency in civil society engagement with the OSCE by moving beyond ceremonial inclusion of CSOs in OSCE events, when they are relegated to a role of providers of monitoring information, to proactively claiming a role as partners in deliberation of challenges and strategies of response, agenda-setting, joint decision-making, participation in the implementation and evaluation of outcomes; build institutional pathways for participatory governance and introduce mechanisms for joint agenda-setting, generating feedback from OSCE structures and participating States, and institutionalisation of advisory roles for CSOs;
- put forward concrete proposals on action plans and roadmaps for implementation of the OSCE Ministerial Council decisions, guidelines by OSCE institutions, recommendations in the Moscow Mechanism reports, etc. and proactively engage with interested participating States and OSCE institutions to discuss the proposals, work together on drafting and implementing decisions;
- work to overcome scepticism about civil society’s greater role in the Helsinki process on the part of participating States and OSCE bodies;
- work to overcome the “elitist” character of the current civil society engagement with the OSCE by expanding the circle of CSOs and activists involved in this work and make efforts to hold offline meetings of civil society representatives working to promote the Helsinki principles on a more regular basis and in a more deliberative, inclusive, and participatory way, aimed at collective decision-making, cross-generational dialogue, solidarity and cooperation between movements and beyond borders.

## **9. ADVANCING THE HELSINKI PRINCIPLES BEYOND THE OSCE: WHAT CIVIL SOCIETY CAN DO**

### ***Problem statement and analysis***

Re-centering the OSCE around its original purpose to serve as a platform for dialogue, rights, and cooperation across divides means ensuring that civil society is not a symbolic participant, but a strategic partner with real influence across all dimensions of security policy – from military affairs to environmental resilience and social cohesion. This reinvestment in human security, rooted in the Helsinki principles, is the only path forward to a peaceful and just international order.

The defence and advancement of the Helsinki principles cannot rely solely on states. Civil society organisations, both as watchdogs and a visionary force, must reclaim a proactive role in updating and advancing these principles – within and beyond the OSCE. The civic actors of the 1970s who gave rise to the Helsinki Movement – grassroots monitors, dissidents and human rights defenders – transformed the Final Act from paper into pressure, from promise into performance. Today, a new generation must undertake a similar challenge, but in a vastly more complex and dangerous geopolitical environment.

This is not just a matter of defending “space” for civil society. Civil society must move from reacting to repression to reshaping the agenda. This includes pioneering new forms of engagement, building strategic alliances across sectors and regions, and articulating a people-centred vision of security rooted in human rights and justice, inclusion and participation.

Not all civic formations may speak the language of “OSCE commitments,” but they act on them through anti-war work, climate justice, feminist and anti-racism activism, defence of human dignity. Yet, just as “traditional” NGOs, they are also heirs to the Helsinki legacy. To make an impact, we must try new approaches: embedding the Helsinki principles into transnational civic networks; transforming the notion of comprehensive security into a people-first agenda; and connecting the dots between local struggles and global accountability tools. It is about reviving Helsinki from below and beyond borders.

### ***Recommendations***

Following the lessons of the Civic Solidarity Platform and recommendations from the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process, civil society groups should unite their efforts in the following areas:

Support and protect civic actors at risk:

- understanding that repression of human rights defenders, independent journalists and lawyers is a critical security issue, strengthen legal, digital, and material support systems for civic groups and activists, especially those in exile or under authoritarian regimes;
- develop mutual aid protocols and emergency response networks, drawing from the lived experience of solidarity under pressure (e.g., Belarus, Russia, Central Asia, etc.);
- form civic resilience networks to ensure protection and continuity of work despite repression;
- use the OSCE space to highlight attacks on civic actors as threats to the integrity of the Helsinki principles.

Expand public engagement and human rights education:

- launch educational and awareness raising initiatives (“Spirit of Helsinki/Human Security schools”) to promote civic knowledge and transfer of practical experience, as well as participatory skills and civic imagination;
- replace tokenistic participation with citizen assemblies, dialogue forums, and educational formats in multiple OSCE languages; shift from expert-only models to participatory ones where communities are agents, not audiences;
- engage youth and underrepresented communities to build long-term civic capacity and re-legitimise human rights discourse;
- raise awareness about the Helsinki principles and the notion of comprehensive and human security among civil society as well as among diplomats and government representatives.

Ensure economic and operational sustainability:

- reflecting numerous calls for structural sustainability of civil society, explore alternative funding models – social enterprises, community-supported initiatives, crowdfunding, and solidarity economies – to reduce dependency on shifting priorities of governmental programmes and volatile cycles of private donors. Encourage the creation of civic infrastructure – legal, logistical, and economic – that does not rely solely on donor agendas.
- promote horizontal resource-sharing among civil society actors and diaspora groups.

#### Reclaim and renew the Helsinki principles:

- promote the Helsinki+50 Manifesto and push to reinterpret the 1975 Helsinki principles through contemporary lenses: climate justice, intersectionality, anti-war agenda, anti-authoritarianism, and solidarity with oppressed peoples;
- form thematic civic clusters (e.g., digital rights, environmental justice, transitional justice, peacebuilding) that act within and beyond OSCE frameworks;
- use anniversaries not merely for reflection, but as opportunities to mobilise collective memory and action.

#### Build durable and intersectional coalitions:

- reach beyond the human rights movement by building bridges with global justice movements and proactively establishing cross-sectoral, intersectional, and intergenerational alliances — including with environmentalists, climate defenders, trade unions, anti-war groups, feminist movements, LGBTQ+ networks, Indigenous peoples, diasporas, and others;
- create sustained, trust-based working groups that can respond to crises, build joint advocacy, and sustain presence in international fora;
- learn from the Helsinki movement’s legacy and Civic Solidarity Platform’s evolution to avoid fragmentation and strengthen long-term trust-based collaboration.

#### Engage strategically with institutions – within and beyond the OSCE:

- use existing OSCE platforms tactically to spotlight civic concerns and push for structural reforms;
- channel relevant recommendations to other international bodies (e.g., UN Human Rights Council, Council of Europe) and engage subnational actors such as cities and parliaments as alternative sites of diplomacy and civic influence;
- reassert civil society not as a supplementary stakeholder, but as a co-architect of security, peace, and human dignity.



## STATEMENT ON COUNTRY SITUATIONS REQUIRING URGENT ATTENTION

Presented at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference 2025

Vienna • 3 December 2025

The implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments has continued to deteriorate in 2025 across the entire OSCE region, both East and West of Vienna. This includes visible regress in the implementation by many States of their commitments on rule of law, human rights and democratic institutions. However, situation in several OSCE participating States stands out due to the scope of violations and the rate of negative change and is therefore particularly worrying.

Wide-ranging problems found in essentially all of these countries include the undermining of the principles of democratic governance, erosion of the rule of law, restrictions of democratic elections and equal playing field for participation in the political process, lack of independence of the judiciary and fair trial guarantees, abuse of counter-extremism and anti-terrorism laws as a pretext for restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms, politically motivated persecution of critics of the authorities on fabricated charges, suppression of the freedom of expression, independent media and internet, severe restriction of the freedom of peaceful assembly and criminalisation of protest, adoption of repressive laws and policies against civil society resulting in the elimination of civic space, widespread torture by the police and in places of detention, use of transnational repression instruments for persecution of exiled opponents, discrimination against minorities, attacks on migrants, and pervasive impunity of perpetrators of violations. Governments share worst practices, copy-paste repressive laws, and cooperate in persecuting their opponents.

We provide a brief overview of the worrying situations in eleven countries – Azerbaijan, Belarus, all states of the Central Asia region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, and the USA. Situation in Ukraine is very dire but different from those in other states, as daily numerous crimes and terror in the course of the unceasing Russian aggression remains the main challenge to human rights in this country.

While the list of problematic country situations is not exhaustive, the situations under review require immediate attention and urgent response by OSCE political bodies, institutions, participating States, and civil society in order to reverse the negative developments, uphold the OSCE commitments and extend support, solidarity and assistance to victims of violations and those who work to prevent and stop the abuse. To facilitate a response, we provide recommendations to OSCE political bodies, institutions, participating States, and civil society.

### AZERBAIJAN

Over the past two years, the government has intensified its harsh crackdown on civil society activists and critics on fabricated and politically motivated charges, as well as by arbitrarily applying highly restrictive NGO laws. **The government prevents organisations from registering, accessing funding, or operating legally, thereby pushing them to the margins of the law and heightening their vulnerability to retaliatory criminal prosecution.** It has severely curtailed access to foreign funding, which used to be the primary source of support for most human rights

groups and NGOs critical of government policies. The restrictions of legitimate work of civil society and media have strikingly limited the space for independent activism, critical journalism and peaceful oppositional political activity.

**Recent arrests and convictions of at least 60 human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, opposition politicians, academics,** and other critics have instilled fear among remaining independent voices. Among them are at least 25 journalists from the top independent Azerbaijani news outlets, mostly with Toplum TV, Meydan TV and Abzas Media. **Azerbaijan is reported to hold the highest number of political prisoners in two decades. Estimates from local human rights groups suggest that the figure has risen to several hundred individuals.** Among political prisoners are **prominent civil society leaders Akif Gurbanov and Anar Mammadli, well-known political analyst Azar Gasimli, and leading opposition politician Tofiq Yagublu.** Most of them faced fabricated charges of committing financial crimes, including currency smuggling, money laundering, and tax evasion — all linked to the alleged receipt of illegal Western donor funding.

Since November 2023, **dozens of activists have fled the country into exile,** significantly shrinking the diversity of actors advocating for human rights and government accountability. **Authorities have recently intensified their campaign against exiled critics,** with courts issuing numerous arrest warrants and handing down convictions in absentia. These actions, widely viewed as politically motivated, reflect a broader strategy and **transnational repression in the form of criminal prosecution in absentia** to suppress dissent and restrict freedom of expression both inside the country and beyond its borders.

Azerbaijan currently holds **nine women journalists in jail for their work**—an unprecedented crackdown, widely viewed as retaliation for uncovering government corruption and marking the harshest repression of women journalists since the country's independence. Some of the **detained women journalists have serious health conditions and face heightened risks** due to unsafe detention conditions and limited access to adequate health care.

Apart from unjust detention and convictions by abusing criminal justice system, many **more activists face arbitrary travel bans, interrogation and intimidation.** Combined with a highly restrictive legal framework for independent civil society and media, the **ongoing crackdown risks eliminating all dissent, free expression and legitimate human rights activity,** underscoring the need for a robust international response by the OSCE alongside other international organisations.

#### **Recommendations:**

- OSCE Secretary General and other senior OSCE officials should step up public contacts with the remaining civil society representatives in Azerbaijan when conducting high-level meetings with the Azerbaijani authorities and demand release of political prisoners.
- The OSCE participating states through their embassies in Baku should attend and monitor trials of journalists, human rights defenders and political activists in Azerbaijan.
- In line with the 2018 Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media should urge the release of all detained media workers — with particular attention to the nine women journalists currently imprisoned — to foster a safe working environment and ensure the protection of journalists.

- OSCE/ODIHR should establish robust and dedicated monitoring mechanisms on Azerbaijan, including creating a specific mandate to systematically track and respond to the ongoing repression and the rapidly shrinking civic space.
- OSCE participating States should consider invoking the Moscow Mechanism in respect of Azerbaijan, focusing on political-motivated persecution of civic activists and journalists and the suppression of freedom of assembly and freedom of association.
- OSCE participating States and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE bodies, should resist efforts by the Azerbaijani authorities to use their hosting of major international events and signing of international trade agreements as an instrument to conceal large-scale repression and portray the government as a reliable partner of democratic states.

## BELARUS

In May 2025, 38 OSCE participating States again condemned the Belarusian regime's persistent disregard for OSCE principles and urged the release of all political prisoners. Despite these calls, **systemic repression of dissent in Belarus continues**, with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus reporting "no sign of improvement."

The release of around 380 political prisoners since 2024 has not signalled genuine progress; **at least 1,245 individuals remain imprisoned for political reasons**. Rather than indicating a reduction in repression, these selective releases have occurred alongside an **expanding crackdown that targets not only outspoken critics of the regime but virtually any citizen**.

**Detention conditions remain extremely harsh**, often amounting to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or torture. At least five individuals have been held **incommunicado** for periods ranging from six months to two years, deprived of all contact with the outside world, in direct violation of international norms and OSCE commitments. **Nine political prisoners have died in custody**, with no proper investigation of the causes of death.

The authorities have also continued the **systematic dismantling of civil society**. Since 2021, nearly 2,000 NGOs, including human rights groups, trade unions and political parties, have been forcibly liquidated. Members of these organisations, including **at least five human rights defenders, with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2022 Ales Bialiatski among them, remain behind bars**. A restrictive re-registration campaign for religious organisations now imposes requirements many communities cannot meet, threatening a significant decline in the number of registered religious groups.

**Independent media cannot function** inside Belarus. Their content is banned and journalists face criminal prosecution. **At least 28 media professionals remain behind bars**, and at least 76 more cases against media workers are currently under investigation, initiated under the "special proceedings" mechanism.

**Anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation is routinely misused to suppress dissent** and sentence people for extremely long prison terms, while more than 50 legal acts have been adopted

or amended in recent years to intentionally formalise arbitrary limitations of human rights or create conditions for their violation.

**The regime also extends the coercive practices beyond national borders by actively using transnational repression tools.** An array of instruments involve trials in absentia, including of the whole groups of people, threats against and persecution of relatives, severe obstacles in accessing consular services unless the exiles return to Belarus, leading to impediments to mobility as a result of the termination of the issuance of new passports to Belarusians abroad and renewing the old ones, confiscation of property, public threats, abductions and coerced returns, physical attacks, surveillance, digital interference, threats and hacking, and the misuse of Interpol and other mechanisms of international cooperation on legal matters, all used to intimidate those deemed disloyal.

In February 2025, the UN-established Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that **some of the documented violations constitute crimes against humanity**, carried out intentionally as part of a widespread and systematic attack on a segment of the civilian population. At the same time, **impunity for human rights abuse, including crimes against humanity, prevails in Belarus**, and no perpetrators have been brought to justice by international or national courts.

#### **Recommendations to OSCE participating States:**

- invoke the OSCE Moscow Mechanism under a revised mandate to evaluate Belarus's human rights record and the regime's use of transnational repression for persecution of Belarusians abroad as a possible crime against humanity;
- press for the broadest possible release of political prisoners in any negotiations with Belarus, prioritising those on the humanitarian list, and make clear that releases cannot be separated from the need to halt the ongoing repression;
- demand proof of life and well-being of political prisoners, an end to incommunicado detention, humane conditions in all detention facilities, and access for diplomatic missions to places of detention, especially where prisoners are held incommunicado;
- intensify efforts to end impunity in Belarus and bring perpetrators of gross human rights violations and alleged crimes against humanity to justice by submitting new referrals of the situation in Belarus and neighbouring countries to the ICC Prosecutor, initiating effective investigations at national level on the basis of the universal jurisdiction principle, and submitting inter-state complaints to the International Court of Justice on violation by Belarus of the Convention against Torture;
- resist and oppose abuse of international mechanisms of cooperation on criminal matters by the Lukashenka regime as part of its transnational repression actions; in particular, deny requests for extradition of Belarusians at risk of politically motivated persecution, especially those in asylum or international protection procedures, holding humanitarian visas, or with a similar status; apply additional vetting to extradition requests and Interpol notices by Belarus;
- maintain and expand support for Belarusian civil society, human rights defenders, and people inside the country and in exile through sustained funding for Belarus-focused programmes;

- encourage host countries to strengthen protection, rehabilitation, and services for victims of torture and repression;
- expand opportunities for Belarusians to take part in cultural, educational, and community initiatives that counter Belarusian state and Russian propaganda and keep Belarusian society connected to the international community, to prevent the creation of a new “Iron Curtain”.

## CENTRAL ASIA REGION

Human rights organisations report continued deterioration of the implementation of OSCE commitments across Central Asia. Reports cite credible and systematic instances of torture, ill-treatment, and the arbitrary arrest and detention of civil society representatives, journalists and other actual or perceived critics of government policies in all five Central Asian states. In often cases, these actions occurred despite — and at times under the guise of — ongoing or declared reform commitments. Core freedoms, especially of expression and media, remain severely restricted, with journalists subjected to harassment and reprisals. Activists cite state control of religious institutions, abuse of vague extremism-related and terrorism charges, a lack of judicial independence, and pervasive corruption as systemic rule-of-law failures.

## KAZAKHSTAN

General deterioration of the human rights situation across the OSCE region also affects Kazakhstan. The authorities continue to exert **pressure on civic activists and human rights defenders**, resorting to administrative arrests and detentions. Authorities increasingly apply **criminal penalties, charging activists with “extremism”**, including “spreading of hatred”. Such punishment has a chilling affect and completely precludes any further public activity. The authorities are attempting to **tighten legislation on NGOs** and have adopted lists of individuals and organisations receiving foreign funding. While authorities still engage with civil society organisations, it is mostly limited to social, non-political issues.

**Freedom of peaceful assembly is severely restricted**; it is practically impossible to hold assemblies and pickets. Recently, in a striking development, **legislation banning “LGBT propaganda”, reminiscent of the Russian law, was adopted**. It has already led to pressure and provocations against LGBT activists and fears that these changes may lead to tightening of laws against other groups.

**Parliamentary reform causes serious concerns** about the implementation of the OSCE commitments to democratic governance and equal opportunities in political competition: elimination of the Senate and keeping only a unicameral parliament, with elections there only through party lists would bar independent candidates from entering parliament.

### Recommendations:

- OSCE bodies and participating States should urge the government of Kazakhstan to seize pressure on civic activists and their politically-motivated persecution, refrain from adopting restrictive legislation and policies on NGOs, bring the law on peaceful assemblies in line with OSCE commitments, repeal discriminatory amendments to laws

banning “LGBT propaganda”, and allow independent candidates who are not party members to run for the parliament.

- OSCE officials should indicate in their contacts with representatives of Kazakhstan that these negative developments contradict OSCE commitments and go contrary to the declared reforms.

## KYRGYZSTAN

Human rights defenders observe a persistent and alarming trend of legislative changes, judicial restrictions and arbitrary actions of the authorities in Kyrgyzstan, **severely undermining the exercise of fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression and leading to further shrinking of civic space in the country. Judicial bodies lack independence** and are increasingly used for politically motivated persecution. At the same time, courts regularly dismiss credible allegations of torture and condone impunity for other human rights violations.

**Legal framework and law enforcement practice increasingly restrict the right to peaceful assembly.** Local administrative bodies and courts frequently impose blanket bans or geographically restrict peaceful assemblies, particularly in central areas of Bishkek. These restrictions are often made in absentia, without proper notification to organisers, and lack the necessary legal basis of strict necessity and proportionality required under international law. Legislative initiatives, attempting to limit funding for assemblies (e.g., prohibiting foreign financial support) and impose excessive administrative requirements are indicative of a legislative trend to restrict this fundamental right.

**Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is under increasing pressure, leading to an environment of self-censorship and fear.** New or amended laws further restrict this freedom. They contain vaguely worded provisions concerning content deemed to incite “interracial, ethnic, religious, interregional hostility” or promoting a “cult of violence.” These ambiguities leave significant room for arbitrary interpretation and are used by authorities to suppress legitimate journalistic work, critical reporting, and public discourse. Legislative attempts, such as previous drafts of the Media Law or regulations on media registration, have introduced problematic provisions that grant authorities wide powers to obstruct the work of media outlets and encourage state censorship, in direct violation of the Constitution. **Independent journalists, investigative media agencies, such as those exposing high-level corruption, hate speech, and systemic impunity, are increasingly targeted by politically-motivated persecution based on fabricated charges.**

Increasing economic gaps and poverty rates in Kyrgyzstan are not merely financial issues; they are fundamental barriers to exercise of human rights and often intersect with civil and political rights violations. Concentration of wealth exacerbates the vulnerability of marginalised groups and often leads to violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The rights of citizens, particularly the poor and those in informal settlements, are frequently violated through **illegal forced evictions and the destruction of homes** by local authorities or private construction companies. Such actions are carried out without due process, adequate compensation, or the provision of suitable alternative housing, **directly violating the right to adequate housing** guaranteed by the Constitution and international standards, and constituting a form of **systemic state-sanctioned violence against the most vulnerable groups.**

### Recommendations:

- OSCE political bodies, institutions and participating States should urge the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to revise national laws pertaining to media, peaceful assemblies, and NGOs, to ensure full compliance with of the state's international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments; cease arbitrary restrictions on exercise of fundamental rights and ensure that any restrictions on the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression strictly adhere to the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality as defined by international human rights law; and ensure independence of the judiciary by taking concrete steps to eliminate the systemic weaknesses that allow for arbitrary decisions, dismissal of torture allegations, and the use of the court system for political persecution.
- OSCE participating States and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE and the European Union, should condition development of assistance programmes, bilateral economic cooperation and adoption of multilateral cooperation and trade agreements on tangible and measurable progress in bringing legislation and policies in line with international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments and ending violations in a number of areas, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and independence of the judiciary.

### TAJIKISTAN

Authorities have significantly **restricted independent civil society through NGO closures and the detention of bloggers, journalists, and public figures for peaceful expression.**

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee estimates at least **600 political prisoners. Opposition groups** such as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and Group 24 **remain banned, with members serving prolonged sentences.** Authorities seek **extradition of people from abroad** linked to banned opposition parties.

**In the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, repression continues** following peaceful protests in 2021–2022. In 2025, five detained members of Pamiri ethnic group reportedly died in custody.

### Recommendations:

- OSCE participating States should apply diplomatic, economic, and political pressure on Tajikistan to release political prisoners, including arbitrarily detained Pamiris, and to end state-led repression.
- OSCE participating States should refrain from being involved in transnational repression targeting Tajik activists in exile.

### TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan remains one of the most closed and authoritarian states in the world, imposing **freedom of movement restrictions**, including arbitrary foreign travel bans on thousands of people and refusing visits by UN human rights experts and international NGOs.

**Transnational repression** targeting dissidents residing abroad is on the rise and often involves cooperation with authorities of the host countries. In particular, Turkish authorities routinely detain and deport Turkmen migrants, including activists who became government critics while in Türkiye, after they became undocumented due to Turkmenistan's refusal to renew passports via its consular services.

With many wrongfully imprisoned individuals remaining behind bars, **enforced disappearances** in prisons of at least a hundred actual or perceived critics of the authorities have persisted for more than two decades, despite concerns repeatedly raised by a number of OSCE participating States. Credible reports document **widespread torture and inhuman conditions in detention**, persisting with impunity.

**Independent media and independent civil society are non-existent**, and internet access is heavily censored. While the country remains closed to independent scrutiny, **activists and their relatives often face reprisals**.

**Recommendations:**

- OSCE participating States should protect Turkmen activists from persecution, imminent arrest and torture by refraining from deporting or forcibly returning them to Turkmenistan from exile.
- OSCE participating States should consider invoking the Moscow Mechanism report to investigate enforced disappearances and torture in prisons.
- OSCE participating States and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE bodies and European Union institutions, should condition development of assistance programmes, bilateral economic cooperation and adoption of multilateral cooperation and trade agreements on tangible and measurable progress in ending systemic violations of human rights in a number of areas, including freedom of movement, prohibition of enforced disappearances and torture in prisons, freedom of expression and access to information, and refraining from transnational repression against exiled critics.

**UZBEKISTAN**

**Civil society organisations face restrictive registration procedures.** While at least two bloggers remain in forced psychiatric confinement, **authorities continue to use politically motivated psychiatric assessments to silence dissent.** Blogger Valijon Kalonov has been diagnosed with mental illness without any credible basis and subsequently placed in psychiatric institution since 2021.

**Restrictions on freedom of religion** persist through registration barriers and prosecutions – primarily of Muslims – **under broad extremism provisions.** On 31 January 2023, blogger and lawyer Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov was sentenced to 16 years for his alleged role in the 2022 Karakalpakstan protests.

**Recommendations:**



- OSCE bodies, institutions, and participating States should urge Uzbekistan to release individuals detained for exercising fundamental rights, including Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, Nargiz Keldiyorova, Dildora Khakimova, and Valijon Kalonov.
- OSCE bodies, institutions, and participating States should urge Uzbekistan to ensure registration and functioning of civil organisations without undue restrictions, eliminate abuse of psychiatry for politically motivated persecution, and end excessive restrictions on freedom of religion.

## GEORGIA

Georgia, once regarded as a regional leader in democratic reform, has become **a clear case of state capture**. In December 2024, OSCE participating States invoked the Vienna Mechanism to examine its compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments, but the authorities' response was wholly inadequate. Since then, **the situation has deteriorated sharply**.

November 2025 marks one year of daily protests in Georgia, met by authorities with **systematic human rights violations, including the arbitrary detention of peaceful protesters, targeted harassment and physical attacks against journalists and the pervasive torture of detainees**. The most recent journalistic investigation of BBC even suggests that the authorities used bromobenzyl cyanide, also known as camite, a World War One-era substance which could be classed as a chemical weapon, to quell anti-government protesters. Alongside the violence, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party has increasingly **weaponized the justice system to punish protesters, journalists and opposition figures**. To suppress the protest movement, GD has pushed through **a series of legislative amendments that effectively dismantle the right to peaceful assembly**. By late 2025, up to 150 people have been prosecuted on politically motivated criminal charges, and thousands have been fined for protest-related activities.

The ruling party has **introduced restrictive laws aimed at eliminating civil society and independent media**. These laws have effectively cut CSOs and media off from donor funding, forcing many to cease operations. More than 100 organisations have faced intrusive proceedings by the Anti-Corruption Agency demanding confidential data; their refusal to disclose sensitive information now places CSO leaders at risk of criminal charges. In parallel, at least seven CSOs face politically motivated investigations for alleged “sabotage” and “foreign aiding and abetting hostile activities,” offences punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment.

GD is also reshaping the political landscape ahead of the next electoral cycle. By November 2025, as **the authorities have jailed nearly all opposition leaders**, GD has petitioned the Constitutional Court to **ban three opposition parties**, creating a dangerous precedent for broader political prohibitions. Simultaneously, **amendments to the Electoral Code** have removed provisions enabling citizens residing abroad to vote from their country of residence.

These developments indicate the **consolidation of executive control over the judiciary, law enforcement, and regulatory bodies, as well as the elimination of meaningful checks and balances**. Legislative processes have become opaque, rushed, and detached from public scrutiny. The combined effect is **a coordinated assault on fundamental freedoms** and a dramatic erosion of Georgia's commitments under the OSCE human dimension, including democratic governance, democratic elections, the rule of law, fair trial and the use of the judiciary

for politically-motivated persecution, prevention of arbitrary detention, prevention of torture, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of association, and security of human rights defenders, among others.

### Recommendations:

We urge the OSCE Participating States to:

- make statements about abuses in Georgia in the OSCE Permanent Council and Ministerial Council meetings;
- invoke the OSCE Moscow Mechanism as a follow-up to the December 2024 Vienna Mechanism, enabling an independent assessment of systemic rights violations, politically motivated prosecutions, and the dismantling of civic space in Georgia.
- make urgent steps to strengthen protection mechanisms for Georgian human rights defenders, including emergency assistance, relocation support, and direct financial aid to at-risk CSOs.
- use all existing diplomatic and legal tools, including individual sanctions, against officials responsible for human rights abuses and politically motivated prosecution of human rights defenders, activists, and journalists.

### RUSSIA

Human rights situation in Russia is marked by systematic repression and a steadily narrowing civic space.

The fourth year of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine is accompanied by **brutal suppression of expression of an anti-war position**. Despite a decrease in the number of large-scale anti-war protests, growing censorship and pressure on civil society, including activists, journalists, and independent organisations, continues unabated. The authorities continue to use the full range of repressive tools to suppress anti-war statements, from criminal prosecutions for “fakes” about the Russian army and discrediting the armed forces to extrajudicial punishments, including dismissals, pressure on relatives and refusal to issue documents. **More than 20 thousand people have been detained for anti-war protests** since the beginning of the full-scale invasion; most of them have received administrative punishment.

New laws are being adopted that expand the powers of the security forces and strengthen control over critics of the government. The authorities pay special attention to the fight against the anti-war position on the Internet. Most criminal cases are initiated for publications on social networks. Human rights defenders are aware of **more than 1,000 people who have been criminally prosecuted or are under criminal investigation for anti-war statements**. These include journalists, bloggers, politicians, entrepreneurs, artistic figures, students, and lay persons. **Aleksei Gorinov, a municipal deputy in Moscow and a member of the "Solidarity" Democratic Movement, was the first person imprisoned under the “fake news” law** enacted after the invasion of Ukraine. His crime was publicly speaking out against holding a children’s drawing competition in 2022. Gorinov said that during the war, such a competition would look like a “feast during the plague,” since “about a hundred children were killed in Ukraine, children become orphans”. He was sentenced in July 2022 to seven years in prison for “spreading false

information” about the Russian army. In November 2024, he was given an additional three years in prison on new charges of “justifying terrorism”. In prison, Gorinov is systematically subjected to torturous conditions, punishment, and denial of medical assistance. **Human rights defender, member of Moscow regional branch of “Memorial” Mikhail Kriger** who is known for his active anti-war position, was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment for publications in social networks. In detention, he has faced repeated placements in solitary confinement, leading him to launch a hunger strike in protest against the punitive conditions, isolation from other inmates, and the cancellation of family visits.

A separate category includes individuals, prosecuted under more serious war-related actions, including arsons, diversions, explosions, passing information to the Ukrainian armed forces, joining the Ukrainian armed forces, donations to the Ukrainian armed forces. **Hundreds of these people were convicted on charges of terrorism, espionage, and state treason.** Finally, since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the courts have received at least **16,120 cases related to refusal to serve in the Russian army.**

The security forces are actively persecuting not only Russian citizens, but also Ukrainians – both prisoners of war and civilians detained on the occupied territories. Many of them are illegitimately accused of espionage, terrorism or high treason and receive very long prison sentences. **The situation of tens of thousands of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian hostages in Russian captivity is dire.** They are systematically and brutally **subjected to torture**, deprived of health care, and many have died in prison. A large number of them are **kept in detention without charges and in complete isolation**, without access to lawyers and information for relatives, in violation of international law and OSCE commitments. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Russia has systematically refused to acknowledge the detention of thousands of Ukrainians, both military and civilian. According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war have the right to humane treatment, protection from torture, and family ties. Moreover, many POWs are illegally prosecuted for participating in hostilities, which is explicitly prohibited by international law.

**Moreover, thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly removed from the territory of Ukraine and subjected to assimilation, "Russification" and ideological indoctrination.** Under the guise of “concern for their safety,” this systematic policy is aimed at destroying their Ukrainian identity and turning them from Ukrainians into Russians. These actions were classified by the International Criminal Court as **crimes against humanity**. Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova were charged with these crimes, and in March 2023 arrest warrants were issued for them.

**To silence dissent, the authorities increasingly rely on anti-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation,** while human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents face growing pressure, both inside the country and in exile. Over the last one to two years, politically motivated prosecutions have shifted heavily into the realm of anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legislation. People who criticise the authorities, engage in opposition activity or work in independent media and human rights organisations are **routinely branded as extremists or terrorists**, which allows the state to use the most severe criminal provisions against them. This approach not only punishes individual critics but also sends a strong warning to anyone considering public dissent.

**The judicial system in Russia is not independent, and courts are routinely used to rubber stamp politically motivated convictions.** Independent attorneys are subjected to increasing

pressure, and the number of imprisoned lawyers is quickly growing. The most recent example includes incarceration of well-known **human rights lawyer Maria Bontsler**, charged with “cooperation on a confidential basis with a representative of a foreign organisation for the purpose of assisting it in activities knowingly directed against the security of the Russian Federation,” punishable with up to eight years in prison. The total number of people recognised by human rights defenders as **political prisoners** is currently 1,221 while by other accounts, the number of individuals imprisoned on politically motivated charges is 1,877.

**Torture and inhuman and degrading treatment in the places of detention is pervasive**, with almost complete impunity of the police and the penitentiary system personnel.

Having eliminated all independent media and having jailed dozens of journalists and bloggers, the authorities have now **expanded their control over the digital space**. Beyond the long standing practice of blocking independent media, websites and VPN services, making it difficult to access independent information, they now resort to cutting internet access entirely in specific regions under the security pretext. New "whitelists" of allowed sites and applications, largely limited to state owned or state controlled resources, further reduce access to independent information and force users into an information environment shaped by the authorities.

The practice of including independent media, human rights organisations, and individual activists in the **lists of “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations”** persists. Recent outstanding designations of undesirable organisations include the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Human Rights Watch, and the Civic Solidarity Platform, demonstrating a peculiar way the Russian government marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Civic activists are persecuted under criminal charges of cooperating with or organising the work of an “undesirable organisation”. **Grigory Melkonians, head of election monitoring movement “Golos”, is serving a five-year prison term on these charges.**

**Repression now extends well beyond Russia’s borders.** The state pursues those who have fled through transnational means, relying on bilateral agreements and Interpol mechanisms to seek their arrest and return. Documented cases in countries such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, as well as in other CIS states and even within the European Union, illustrate how **this practice endangers exiled activists and has a chilling effect on Russian communities abroad.**

Russian government and its propaganda demonstrate **aggressive and xenophobic attitudes to people from other countries** – first of all to Ukrainians, but also to migrants from Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, and at the same time support nationalistic and homophobic discourse towards people from Russia itself, targeting ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTIQ people, and even attacking the rights of women.

**Situation has significantly worsened for millions of labour migrants** since 2022: political pressure is growing and includes the increasing number of deportations and bans on many professions and activities (for example, those who are in an irregular legal status are not allowed to drive, marry, or study), etc. Police raids targeting visual minorities, most often migrants from Central Asia but also Roma and other minority groups, are regularly carried out in all parts of Russia, often with participation of extreme nationalist groups. Migrants and members of

minorities are charged with serious crimes (terrorism, murder, etc.), and the state propaganda uses these arguments to justify violations of their rights and discriminatory practices.

In 2013, a law banning the so-called “**LGBT propaganda**” was adopted in Russia. Initially framed as a measure to “protect children”, this law was extended to all age groups in 2022. Under the pretext of protecting “traditional values”, the authorities have been **increasing discrimination and stigmatisation of LGBTIQ people** ever since, undermining their fundamental human rights. Following the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, anti-LGBTIQ policies have reached alarming proportions. First, the law banning transgender transition was introduced, depriving transgender people from access to essential medical assistance. Soon, the Russian **Supreme Court declared a non-existent “public international LGBT movement and all its subdivisions” an extremist organisation**, creating a legal basis for prohibiting and systematic persecution of any public and private gatherings of LGBTIQ people, provision of services to LGBTIQ people, and the work of civil society organisations protecting the rights or providing assistance to LGBTIQ people. Combined with more aggressive application of the anti-“LGBT propaganda” legislation, these increasingly repressive policies of **the Russian government have put LGBTIQ people in the situation of extreme discrimination, pressure and isolation**. The majority of specialised NGOs have been forced to shut down or relocate to other countries.

#### **Recommendations:**

- OSCE bodies, institutions and participating States should respond by strengthening support to Russian civil society, in particular organisations that continue to provide legal assistance on the ground, including in cases linked to the misuse of anti-terrorist and anti-extremist laws, through flexible funding, help with banking and legal registrations, and accessible visa procedures.
- They should also ensure that companies and services under their jurisdiction, such as crowdfunding platforms, IT providers and banks, do not facilitate Russia's crackdown on internet freedoms and civil society through overcompliance with Russian demands or sanctions regimes, and should back effective tools to circumvent censorship, including free VPN and similar services.
- OSCE participating States must refuse to take part in Russia's politically motivated transnational repression by declining arrest and extradition requests in such cases and, where there is doubt, consult independent Russian civil society organisations when assessing the political nature of a case.

#### **UKRAINE**

While international efforts have intensified to reach agreements on achieving peace and ending Russian aggression against Ukraine, **the main challenge to human rights in Ukraine remains the daily numerous crimes and terror in the course of the unceasing aggression**.

The aggression violates **the basic rights: to life** as a result of regular indiscriminate shelling of residential buildings, educational and medical institutions and civilian infrastructure, and the killing of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians in places of forced detention in Russia and the occupied territories; **to liberty and personal integrity** as a result of mass illegal imprisonment in the occupied territories; **not to be tortured** – as a result of the widespread and systemic nature of

torture, harassment and ill-treatment of prisoners of war and civilian hostages; **to a fair trial** as a result of the conviction of Ukrainians by Russian courts for participating in the defence of their country and for crimes they did not commit; **to freedom of opinion** as a result of persecution by the occupiers for expressing one's opinion.

**Violation of the rights of Ukrainians is a deliberate systemic state policy of the Russian Federation** aimed at suppressing resistance to aggression and consolidating control over the occupied territories.

**The Russian regime has blocked all OSCE efforts to influence the human rights situation in the occupied territories of Ukraine, with the exception of the Moscow Mechanism**, which allows investigating human rights violations in a particular country. After the outbreak of full-scale Russian aggression, the reports of the Moscow Mechanism experts, as well as the reports of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, proved that **the Russian regime had committed numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity**, objectively documented **human rights violations by the occupiers in such areas as child abduction, arbitrary detention of civilians, torturous conditions of detention of prisoners of war**, etc. The ICC Prosecutor has issued arrest warrants for two Russian civilian leaders and four military leaders on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. At the same time, **many human rights violations caused by the Russian aggression remain unknown to the public and the authorities of the OSCE participating States**. This allows the occupiers to try to present their actions as something normal and not violating international standards.

Another acute human rights challenge is **the lack of information in international organisations and Ukraine about the fate of Ukrainian prisoners of war and illegally imprisoned civilians**. The Geneva Conventions on Prisoners of War and the Protection of Civilians obligate all States parties to comply with the minimum standard for informing about the fate of prisoners of war and detained civilians. However, the Russian Federation does not abide by this obligation during its aggression against Ukraine.

In September 2025, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism experts released a report on the situation of Ukrainian prisoners of war in the Russian Federation and the occupied territories.<sup>3</sup> They concluded that “the Russian National Information Bureau (NIB) is not fully transparent, which limits the exchange of information about prisoners of war.” But **the reality is that the Russian regime has not actually set up information bureaus for either prisoners of war or civilians**. A Russian fake called the “Information Bureau for Prisoners of War” (actually just a “hotline” of the Ministry of Defence) does not perform the functions provided for in art. 122 of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War and art. 136 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

#### **Recommendations to OSCE participating States:**

- Initiate the preparation, within the framework of the Moscow Mechanism, of a report on the Russian Federation's compliance with international obligations to inform about the

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<sup>3</sup> Report on Possible Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, Related to the Treatment of Ukrainian POWs by the Russian Federation. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 25 September 2025. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/598042>

fate of prisoners of war and civilians, as well as the consequences of non-compliance with these obligations for human rights.

- Provide necessary financial and technical support to Ukraine to repair its energy infrastructure, destroyed by the aggressor, especially as winter exacerbates existing problems. Provide essential humanitarian assistance, including heating systems, medicine and food, to support internally displaced persons and vulnerable groups.
- The heads of State and their representatives in the process of negotiations on the conditions for ending Russian aggression, strive to achieve conditions ensuring a sustainable and just peace based on the “people first” principle. This should include the release of prisoners of war – Ukrainian civilians illegally kept by the Russian authorities in places of detention in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine, the release and return to their homeland of all Ukrainian and Russian prisoners of war, the release of Russian political prisoners sentenced to imprisonment or held in pre-trial detention for statements or actions directed against the war or in support of Ukraine, the return to the homeland of all Ukrainian children forcibly deported by the Russian authorities, as well as ensuring justice – bringing to account those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity and ensuring access to full rehabilitation, reparation and support mechanisms, including psychological assistance and reintegration programs by victims of crimes and human rights violations.
- Develop a mechanism for international response to the assimilation and the forced indoctrination of deported Ukrainian citizens, especially minors.
- Facilitate the work of the ICC, the UN and the OSCE in investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russia. Resist efforts to exercise political pressure on the ICC aimed at preventing it from effective investigation and issuance of new arrest warrants.
- Open criminal proceedings against Russian war criminals at the national level on the basis of the universal jurisdiction principle.

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

US respect for Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments in the human dimension has deteriorated significantly since 20 January 2025.

The US administration implements its **harsh immigration policy in a manner inconsistent with OSCE commitments and US constitutional safeguards on the rule of law, non-discrimination, and human rights, including prevention of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.** Federal agencies arbitrarily detain and deport thousands, sometimes for peaceful free expression, while senior officials inflame hostility toward non-citizens. Arbitrary and incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, and discriminatory practices such as racial profiling are widespread. Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of migrants in detention has been widely documented at facilities throughout the United States, and detainees are denied access to legal representation, transferred or deported without informing family members, and subjected to violence. Public spaces throughout the country have been militarized under the pretext of stopping violent criminal migrants, including the deployment of the National Guard to multiple cities, including Washington, DC.

The administration's threats and actions **seriously challenge OSCE rule of law and democratic governance commitments** regarding individuals as well as independent governmental and non-governmental institutions, including the judiciary, free media, academia and civil society. Examples include measures to:

- defy judicial rulings and threaten judges;
- sideline the legislature's constitutional role on domestic and foreign deployment of US military forces, appropriations, and mandates for government-funded activities, including foreign assistance and public broadcasting;
- undermine legal guarantees for independent institutions, including think tanks and foundations;
- violate the principle of equal treatment under the law for independent media, universities, and state and local governments, based on their support for administration policies;
- vilify and threaten NGOs, journalists, independent leaders and elected officials believed to oppose the administration policies.

The administration has challenged, with some state support, the ability of the **US to implement OSCE democratic election commitments, including universal suffrage and equality of the vote**. Long-standing issues relating to gerrymandering and voter suppression are exacerbated by re-drawing congressional districts before the 2026 mid-term elections in favor of one party, while criticism by the administration of early and mail-in voting risks limiting universal suffrage and creating unnecessary obstacles disproportionately targets minorities. Despite past practice, the administration has given no clear signal about inviting observers to future elections.

#### **Recommendations to:**

##### *Participating States*

- Use all appropriate tools including quiet diplomacy to emphasize the importance of complying with OSCE commitments with all US interlocutors, including representatives of the current administration and members of Congress.
- Consider making statements about US abuses in the OSCE Permanent and Ministerial Councils and invoking the Moscow Mechanism to address specific alleged US violations of OSCE commitments, including commitments on prevention of arbitrary detention, torture and incommunicado detention, access to justice, rule of law, democratic governance, independence of the judiciary, democratic elections, freedom of the media, academic freedom, and freedom of association, among others, taking into account when and how this would support better implementation and give better prospects to the victims of current violations.

##### *All OSCE political bodies and institutions*

- Proactively use all opportunities to bring OSCE commitments to the attention of US officials, including through private diplomacy, while strengthening contact with civil society, ensuring public statements highlight US violations, and emphasizing willingness to help the US implement its commitments.



#### *ODIHR*

- Maintain dialogue with US authorities and civil society stakeholders on election-related issues, with a view to receiving and accepting an invitation to observe national elections in 2026 and 2028, provided the US allows ODIHR to deploy and manage election observation activity in line with its standard methodology.

#### *Civil society partners*

- Redouble efforts to educate US NGOs and the US public about the Helsinki process and how commitments undertaken over the past 50 years are directly relevant to negative developments in the US since 20 January 2025.