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Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States

Information note

General Rapporteur: Ms Alexandra Louis, France, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

1. Introduction

1.1. Procedure

1. Further to the report by Mr Egidijus Vareikis (Lithuania, EPP/CD) on “Protecting human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states”¹, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, at its meeting in Strasbourg on 26 June 2018, proposed appointing a general rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Following a debate on Mr Vareikis’s report², the Parliamentary Assembly ratified the terms of reference of the general rapporteur on 8 October 2018. At its meeting in Strasbourg on 9 October 2018, the committee appointed Mr Raphaël Comte (Switzerland, ALDE) as the first general rapporteur on this question. Following Mr Comte’s departure from the Assembly, I was appointed as his successor at the committee meeting of 30 January 2020 and was then appointed for a second term of office during the committee meeting of 25 January 2021. This document is based on Mr Comte’s information note of June 2019, which has been declassified³ and is intended to outline the current situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States.

1.2. Relevant issues

2. The committee and the Assembly have been monitoring the situation of human rights defenders in a targeted and specific way since 2006⁴. For the Assembly, human rights defenders are “those who work for the rights of others”, i.e. individuals or groups who act, in a peaceful and legal way, to promote and protect human rights, whether they are lawyers, journalists, members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or others⁵. Their right to take action to promote and protect human rights was first confirmed in the [United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) of 9 December 1998 (hereafter, the “UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”). This Declaration, which states that “[e]veryone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (Article 1) and which stipulates that States must adopt measures to ensure this right (Article 2, 2.), reinforces the importance of states protecting it. At regional level, in particular at Council of Europe level, this was followed on 6 February 2018 by

* Document declassified by the Committee on 22 March 2021.

¹ [Doc. 14567](#), 6 June 2018.

² The debate was held on 26 June 2018. Following the debate, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 2225 \(2018\)](#) and [Recommendation 2133 \(2018\)](#).

³ AS/Jur (2019)31 declassified, 26 June 2019.

⁴ [Doc. 10985](#), 27 June 2006.

⁵ [Resolution 2225 \(2018\)](#), 26 June 2018, paragraph 1.

the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the [Declaration on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities](#).

3. The right to defend others' rights is itself based on the fundamental rights recognised and protected by the European Convention on Human Rights ("the Convention"), such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 9), freedom of expression (Article 10) and freedom of assembly and association (Article 11). In this regard, human rights defenders deserve particular attention, since violations of their rights, threats and violent acts against them may be indicative of the general situation of human rights in the State concerned or a deterioration thereof⁶.

4. Accordingly, responsibility for the protection of human rights defenders rests first and foremost with national governments. Council of Europe member States are therefore under an obligation to create an environment conducive to the activities of human rights defenders and to end all forms of intimidation and reprisals against them⁷.

1.3. *My terms of reference*

5. Given that they refer to the definition of a "human rights defender" contained in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, my terms of reference, as proposed by the committee and approved by the Assembly, authorise me to address matters relating to cases of intimidation and reprisals suffered by human rights defenders, and to serious obstacles to their action in Council of Europe member States (e.g. murders, physical and psychological violence, arbitrary arrests, judicial and administrative harassment, smear campaigns and restrictions on their freedom of movement). Therefore, at least once a year, I shall report to the committee on the information I have collected and the action I have taken. In addition, I have been given responsibility for monitoring the activities of the various bodies and institutions of the Council of Europe and other international organisations dealing with issues relating to human rights defenders; representing the committee and the Assembly vis-à-vis the latter; making statements and calls for action in my capacity as general rapporteur or suggesting that the committee do so, and monitoring what follow-up has been given to previous Assembly resolutions and recommendations in this area. Since I was first appointed, I have already made several statements, in particular on the situation of defenders in Turkey, often jointly with co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee).

2. Recent Council of Europe work on the protection of human rights defenders

6. Four reports on the situation and protection of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States have been produced by the Assembly⁸. They have highlighted the reprisals faced by human rights defenders in certain Council of Europe member States, such as physical and psychological violence, arbitrary arrests, judicial and administrative harassment, smear campaigns and even murder or abduction⁹. In particular, in [Resolution 2095 \(2016\)](#), the Assembly expressed serious concern about acts of reprisals against human rights defenders in Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey and Georgia¹⁰. The Assembly's most recent resolution on this subject – [Resolution 2225 \(2018\)](#) – expresses its concern at the increase in the number of acts of reprisals against human rights defenders, but does not mention any specific Council of Europe member State. However, Mr Vareikis's report (on which the resolution is based) focuses on individual cases of persecution, primarily in Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Turkey, and also, to a certain extent, in France, Greece, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine.

7. In [Recommendation 2133 \(2018\)](#)¹¹, based on the same report by our committee, the Assembly called on the Committee of Ministers to give some thought to and take action on what could be done to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders. It suggested setting up a platform to this end, supporting the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights, implementing the proposal for a contact point in the Private Office of

⁶ See the [Declaration on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities](#), 6 February 2008.

⁷ [Resolution 2225 \(2018\)](#), see footnote no. 4, paragraph 2.

⁸ *The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states*, [Doc. 11841](#), 24 February 2009; *The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states*, [Doc. 12957](#), 11 June 2012; *Strengthening the protection and role of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states*, [Doc. 13943](#), 11 January 2016; *Protecting human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states*, [Doc. 14567](#), 6 June 2018.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ [Resolution 2095 \(2016\)](#), 28 January 2016, paragraph 4.

¹¹ Adopted by the Assembly on 26 June 2018.

the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (a mechanism for regularly reporting on and reacting to cases of intimidation of human rights defenders co-operating with the Organisation), adopting a declaration on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of the civil society space in Europe, and organising a seminar to mark the 10th anniversary of the [Declaration on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities](#).

8. The Committee of Ministers replied to this recommendation in December 2018¹². It shared the Assembly's concerns regarding reprisals against human rights defenders, welcomed the appointment of the general rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and supported the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights, by ensuring that the latter had sufficient financial and human resources. The Committee of Ministers considered that the Secretary General should provide further information on the implementation of his proposed contact point. However, it is regrettable that the Committee of Ministers did not decide to set up a platform for the protection of human rights defenders, as proposed in paragraph 1.3 of [Recommendation 2133 \(2018\)](#). Nor did it respond to the Assembly's recommendations concerning regular exchanges with human rights defenders, better co-ordination between Council of Europe bodies and strengthening co-operation with other international organisations (paragraphs 1.1, 1.5 and 1.8 of the recommendation).

9. Nevertheless, the fact that the protection of human rights defenders was one of the priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship (between November 2018 and May 2019) is to be welcomed. During that chairmanship, a Workshop on the civil society space was organised by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) in Strasbourg on 29 November 2018. In addition, on 28 November 2018, the Committee of Ministers adopted [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and protection of civil society space in Europe](#). This recommendation underscored the key role played by human rights defenders in "independently promoting the realisation of all human rights", recognised and valued their work, deplored the violations and abuses of their rights and reasserted that States were under a "positive obligation to actively protect and promote a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate safely without stigmatisation and fear of reprisals". The appendix to the Recommendation further contains a number of practical recommendations to Council of Europe member States aimed at protecting and protecting civil society space.

10. Moreover, further progress has been made in the Council of Europe. A conference on the role and position of NGOs in the Council of Europe was held in Warsaw on 22 March 2019. In addition, at the 129th session of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki on 17 May 2019, the Committee of Ministers adopted a [decision on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe](#). In this decision, it agreed to "examine further options for strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society organisations (...) in the Organisation", to "further strengthen the Organisation's mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders, including the Secretary General's Private Office procedure on human rights defenders" and to "invite the Secretary General to explore the possibilities of inviting the relevant human rights NGOs to a regular exchange". This decision is therefore to be welcomed, as it is in line with the Assembly's previous recommendations on the need to establish mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders and to strengthen the participation of civil society mechanisms in the activities of the Organisation's bodies. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe is currently working on concrete measures to implement this decision¹³. As general rapporteur, I will be keeping a close eye on these activities.

11. It should also be borne in mind that since 2015, the issue of inappropriate restrictions on the activities of NGOs in Council of Europe member States has already been the focus of three reports written by our committee¹⁴. In its latest resolution on this subject – [Resolution 2362 \(2021\)](#) of 27 January 2021¹⁵ – the Assembly expressed concern that since its most recent resolution on this issue of June 2018 ([Resolution 2226 \(2018\)](#)) "(...) the civil society space continues to shrink in several Council of Europe member States, particularly in the case of NGOs working in the field of human rights", including because of the implementation of restrictive legislation criticised by Council of Europe bodies, and that certain NGOs are subject to smear campaigns and

¹² [Doc. 14772](#), 5 December 2018.

¹³ See her report "Multilateralism in 2020", pp. 14-17.

¹⁴ See the two reports by our former fellow committee member Mr Yves Cruchten (Luxembourg, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group) of December 2015 ([Doc. 13940](#) of 8 January 2016) and May 2018 ([Doc. 14570](#) of 7 June 2018) and my report of December 2020 "Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States", [Doc. 15205](#) of 6 January 2021.

¹⁵ Based on my report, see above. Previously, the Assembly had adopted [Resolution 2096 \(2016\)](#) and [Recommendation 2086 \(2016\)](#) "How can inappropriate restrictions on NGO activities in Europe be prevented?" on 28 January 2016, and then [Resolution 2226 \(2018\)](#) and [Recommendation 2134 \(2018\)](#) "New restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States" on 27 June 2018, based on the two reports by Mr Cruchten.

their activists suffer threats and reprisals¹⁶. It also expressed concern over the impact of restrictive measures taken due to the Covid-19 pandemic and noted that they are having an adverse effect on the functioning of civil society¹⁷. In conclusion, the Assembly urged Council of Europe member States, among other things, to “refrain from adopting new laws which would result in unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions or financial burdens on NGO activities” and “ensure an enabling space for civil society, in particular by refraining from any harassment (judicial, administrative or tax-related), negative public discourse, smear campaigns against NGOs and intimidation of civil society activists”¹⁸.

3. Recent trends in the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States

3.1. General situation

12. As has been stated, the committee’s previous rapporteurs expressed concern about the increasing adverse environment for human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States. In addition, the recent reports of the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) (whose geographical mandate currently encompasses the 27 member States of the European Union as well as North Macedonia and Serbia) mention attacks on, and harassment of, human rights defenders, including negative discourse intended to delegitimise and stigmatise NGOs, which are among the factors that are now hamstringing civil society’s activities¹⁹. According to data from the NGO consortium ProtectDefenders.eu, in 2019, 44 offences committed against defenders in European and Central Asian countries were reported to it. The figure for 2020 is 60; the majority of them were cases of judicial harassment (40 cases) and physical violence (12 cases)²⁰. Activists working in the field of civil and political rights were worst affected (47), but some cases of reprisals also affected activists working for economic, social and cultural rights (10) and for “women’s/gender and sexuality-related” rights (3). Among all victims, men were affected more than women (approximately 55% as compared with 45%). Those most affected were NGOs or members of a grassroots group (34), lawyers (9), activists (8) and journalists (7). Since the beginning of 2021, 35 offences committed against human rights defenders (including 31 cases of judicial harassment) have already been reported in Europe and Central Asia. In view of these data and the findings contained in the Assembly’s previous reports, I would like to continue the work of my predecessors and briefly present the latest developments in this field, in particular in Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey. It should be pointed out that the civil society situation in these three countries was recently outlined in my report on “Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States”²¹, and in its [Resolution 2362 \(2021\)](#), the Assembly expressed concern over the application in these countries of restrictive legislation which has previously been criticised by Council of Europe bodies²².

13. It should also be noted that in the UN, at its 40th session in March 2019, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on “[Recognising the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development](#)”²³. This resolution highlights the growing role of defenders working for the right to a healthy environment and the reprisals to which they have been subjected.

3.2. Selected examples

3.2.1. Azerbaijan

14. On several occasions, the Assembly has expressed concern over the alarming situation of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan due to the heavily constrained environment in which these activists, who are often stigmatised, are forced to operate²⁴. In addition, the situation of political prisoners in that country – including

¹⁶ Paragraph 4 of the resolution.

¹⁷ Paragraph 7 of the resolution.

¹⁸ Paragraphs 10.5 and 10.10 of the resolution.

¹⁹ FRA, [Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#), report, January 2018, pp. 7-13; and [Civic space – experiences of organisations in 2019. Second Consultation](#), 2020.

²⁰ These are followed by five cases of “intimidation” and three cases of “repression”. As of 5 March 2021.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, paragraphs 17-25.

²² Paragraph 4 of the resolution.

²³ A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1, 20 March 2019.

²⁴ See [Resolution 2184 \(2017\)](#) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan and [Resolution 2185 \(2017\)](#) “Azerbaijan’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: what follow-up on respect for human rights?”, which were adopted on 11 October 2017. See also the reports of the Monitoring Committee (co-rapporteurs: Mr Cezar Florin Preda and Mr Stefan Schennach), [Doc. 14403](#), 25 September 2017, and our committee (rapporteur: Mr Alain Destexhe), [Doc. 14397](#), 18

political and social rights activists – has been examined by a fellow member of our committee, Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir (Iceland, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group) in her report “Reported cases of political prisoners in Azerbaijan”²⁵ and in [Resolution 2322 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2170 \(2020\)](#) of the Assembly, which were adopted on 30 January 2020 and based on this report. In the Resolution, the Assembly concludes that there can “[...] no longer be any doubt that Azerbaijan has a problem of political prisoners and that this problem is due to structural and systemic causes”²⁶.

15. Some improvements have been seen with the early release of the investigative journalist Afgan Mukhtarli (arrested and abducted in Georgia in 2017) after he had served half of his six years imprisonment on bogus charges, and that of Fuad Ahmadli, a blogger and Popular Front (APFP) activist, who was freed after spending four years in prison for political reasons²⁷. Despite this, there are still several regrettable cases of reprisals against political opponents²⁸. In addition, at least three journalists and bloggers who have criticised the authorities are still in prison, including Polad Aslanov (sentenced to sixteen years’ imprisonment last November on charges of “high treason”), Araz Guliyev and Elchin Ismayili (who are still serving custodial sentences)²⁹. Activists within the Talysh minority (Fakhraddin Abbasov and Elvin Isayev) have been detained as a result of their activities and critical attitude towards the authorities³⁰. Although an amnesty was decreed in April 2020 for 260 prisoners, according to Amnesty International, activists, journalists and other critics of the authorities were not among those who were released³¹.

16. In addition, repression targeting human rights defenders is being witnessed in the form of restrictions on the right to protest and freedom of assembly. The legislation on this subject, which is couched in broad terms, is often interpreted by local authorities as giving them licence to prohibit demonstrations or prosecute or even threaten demonstrators³². Demonstrations are still banned in the centre of Baku. In February 2020, the police also arrested over a hundred opposition supporters as they gathered to protest against alleged parliamentary election fraud. Before the unauthorised demonstration began, the police kept several activists in their homes and then took them to remote regions some 200 to 300 kilometres from Baku, where they left them.³³ In July 2020, the police also arrested at least 70 people who had demonstrated in the centre of Baku over the military conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia³⁴.

17. The work of human rights defenders is also being threatened by restrictive legislation on NGOs and amendments passed since 2014. In this regard, the processes of registering and receiving foreign grants have been made significantly more onerous and have made it very difficult for human rights NGOs to operate. Foreign donors are required, among other things, to obtain approval from the Ministry of Justice in order to give grants.³⁵

18. The situation of lawyers specialising in human rights or involved in cases featuring a political dimension likewise gives cause for concern. Since 2005, over a dozen lawyers have been disbarred³⁶ and over twenty

September 2017, and [Resolution 2226 \(2018\)](#) “New restrictions on NGO activity in Council of Europe member States”, *op. cit.*, which is based on Mr Cruchten’s report, [Doc. 14570](#), *op. cit.*

²⁵ [Doc. 15020](#) of 18 December 2019.

²⁶ Paragraph 10 of the resolution.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2021: Azerbaijan](#).

²⁸ One example is the case of Tofiq Yagublu, a prominent politician from the opposition party Musavlat, who was sentenced to four years and three months’ imprisonment for hooliganism in a trial allegedly marred by numerous irregularities; in September 2020, he was released and placed under house arrest on health grounds. There is also that of Agil Humbatov, a member of the APFP who was committed to a psychiatric hospital after posting a video criticising the handling of the pandemic by the authorities on Facebook, or that of Niyamaddin Ahmadov, who has been held since April 2020 for a breach of quarantine measures and deprived of all contact with his family for nine months. *Ibid* and Azeri Watchdog – Reporting on Human Rights in Azerbaijan, *Detained opposition activist held incommunicado for nine months*, 18 January 2021.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, see footnote on page no. 27.

³⁰ Amnesty International, *Azerbaijan Authorities Must Release Talysh Activists*, 8 June 2020.

³¹ Amnesty International, *Azerbaijani Authorities Must Halt Crackdown on Dissent and Incarceration of Activists in Conditions Prone to the Spread of Covid-19*, 27 May 2020.

³² For more information, see: *Mid-term Report – Review of the implementation of recommendations UPR 2018 by Azerbaijan*, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre.

³³ Human Rights Watch, see footnote on page no. 27.

³⁴ Amnesty International, *Azerbaijan: End Brutal Crackdown on Opposition Activists*, 5 August 2020.

³⁵ See [Council of Europe must urge Azerbaijan to improve situation for human rights defenders](#), [European Human Rights Advocacy Centre](#) (EHRAC), July 2020.

³⁶ Recently – Yalchin Imanov – in 2019. See EHRAC and Middlesex London University, *Azerbaijani Human Rights Lawyers who have been disbarred, suspended or criminally prosecuted*, January 2021, p. 7.

have been on the receiving end of reprisals from the Azerbaijani Bar Association (ABA) and the authorities³⁷. In November 2019, Shahla Humbatova, the lawyer representing the activist and blogger Mehman Huseynov, had her lawyer's licence suspended and the Azerbaijani Bar Association (ABA) instituted disciplinary proceedings to have her disbarred³⁸. On 5 March 2021, a court confirmed a decision along these lines. In March 2020, the lawyer Elchin Mammad, a fervent human rights defender and president of the organisation of the Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth (SULESY), was arrested by the police after publishing a critical report on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. Last October, he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for "theft resulting in serious damage" and "illegally buying and possessing firearms accessories", as the police had apparently found jewellery and ammunition in his office.³⁹ In 2020, the European Court of Human Rights ("the Court") passed two judgments – *Namazov v. Azerbaijan*⁴⁰ and *Bagirov v. Azerbaijan*⁴¹ – in which it concluded that the disbarment, in 2011 and 2015 respectively, of two famous lawyers who defended political opposition figures – Elchin Namazov and Khalid Bagirov – breached Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS no. 5, "the Convention") (right to respect for private life)⁴². The abuse of disciplinary action in respect of lawyers handling sensitive cases was also criticised by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, in a report following her visit to Azerbaijan in July 2019⁴³.

19. In recent years, the European Court of Human Rights has found breaches of the Convention in several cases concerning the arbitrary arrest and detention of political opposition figures, civil society activists, human rights defenders and critical journalists, often in tandem with infringements of their freedom of expression or assembly⁴⁴. In September 2020, it found several breaches of the Convention in a case concerning the pre-trial detention in 2014 of a renowned journalist, Rauf Mirgadirov, who had been charged with and then convicted of high treason⁴⁵. Nine other judgments also found breaches of Article 18 taken in conjunction with Article 5 of the Convention based on misuse by the authorities of criminal law provisions in relation to arrest and detention for purposes not permitted by the Convention⁴⁶. In one of these judgments – *Aliyev v. Azerbaijan*⁴⁷ – the Court held that there was "a troubling pattern of arbitrary arrest and detention of government critics, civil society activists and human-rights defenders through retaliatory prosecutions and misuse of criminal law in defiance of the rule of law". The Court therefore called on Azerbaijan to take general measures to "focus on the protection of critics of the government, civil society activists and human-rights defenders against arbitrary arrest and detention. The measures to be taken must ensure the eradication of retaliatory prosecutions and misuse of criminal law against this group of individuals and the non-repetition of similar practices in the future"⁴⁸. The overturning of the criminal convictions of Ilgar Mammadov and Rasul Jafarov by the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan on 23 April 2020⁴⁹, which acknowledges the moral damage suffered as a result of their

³⁷ For more information, see *Mid-term Report – Review of the implementation of recommendations UPR 2018 by Azerbaijan*, Lawyers for Lawyers and The Law Society of England and Wales.

³⁸ EHRAC and Middlesex London University, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁹ See the FIDH [Urgent Appeal](#) of 15 October 2020: *Azerbaijan: Sentencing and ongoing arbitrary detention of Mr. Elchin*.

⁴⁰ Application no. 74354/13, judgment of 30 January 2020.

⁴¹ Applications no. 81024/12 and 28198/15, 25 June 2020.

⁴² In the case of *Bagirov v. Azerbaijan*, the Court also held that this measure breached Article 10 of the Convention (freedom of expression). Furthermore, the decision to suspend the lawyer from practising for one year was held contrary to Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention. The Court also passed a judgment in the case of *Aslan Ismayilov v. Azerbaijan* finding a breach of the applicant's right to a fair trial in the process of his disbarment in 2013-2014 due to the national courts' failure to state grounds in relation to his arguments, which were crucial to the outcome of the case (violation of Article 6 of the Convention); application no. 18498/15, judgment of 12 March 2020.

⁴³ CommDH(2019)27, 11 December 2019, paragraphs 92-96.

⁴⁴ See my predecessor's declassified introductory memorandum, AS/Jur(2019)31, *op. cit.*, paragraph 16.

⁴⁵ *Mirgadirov v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 62775/14, judgment of 17 September 2020. The Court found breaches of Articles 5§1 (two), 5§4, 6§2 and 8 of the Convention.

⁴⁶ *Rasul Jafarov v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 69981/14, judgment of 17 March 2016; *Mammadli v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 47145/14, judgment of 19 April 2018; *Rashad Hasanov and Others v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 48653/13+, judgment of 7 June 2018; *Aliyev v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 68762/14+, judgment of 20 September 2018; *Natiq Jafarov*, application no. 64581/16, judgment of 7 November 2019; *Ibrahimov and Mammadov v. Azerbaijan*, application no. 63571/16, judgment of 13 February 2020; *Khadija Ismayilova v. Azerbaijan (No. 2)*, application no. 30778/15, judgment of 27 February 2020 and *Yunusova and Yunus v. Azerbaijan*, application 68817/14, judgment of 30 July 2014. Recently, the Court passed a (still non-final) judgment finding a breach of Article 5§3 and Article 18 taken in conjunction with 5§3 of the Convention in a case concerning the pre-trial detention between 2013 and 2014 of the applicants, students and activists from the NIDA movement: *Azizov and Novrozlu v. Azerbaijan*, applications no. 65583/13 and 70106/13.

⁴⁷ *Aliyev v. Azerbaijan*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 223.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 226.

⁴⁹ In the case of Ilgar Mammadov – following the issuing, by the Committee of Ministers, for the first time, of infringements proceedings under Article 46 § 4 of the Convention.

illegal arrest and detention, pursuant to judgments delivered by the Court⁵⁰, are a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, the convictions of six other applicants who were detained for similar reasons are still in force, and the Committee of Ministers is continuing to consider this issue as part of its supervision of the enforcement of the Court's judgments.⁵¹

3.2.2. Russian Federation

20. For several years, the Assembly has been concerned about the situation of human rights defenders in Russia, and the conditions in which they work have deteriorated further in recent months. Noteworthy in this context is the arbitrary arrest of the Russian opposition politician and anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny on 17 January upon his return to Moscow from Germany, where he had been treated after being poisoned⁵². At the end of February, he was transferred to a prison colony where he will serve a prison sentence of two years and eight months, which was imposed on him following a trial that was found to have been unfair by the European Court of Human Rights.⁵³ However, I will not dwell further on Mr Navalny's situation in the light of his political activities and the fact that our fellow committee member Mr Jacques Maire (France, ALDE) is currently preparing his report on the poisoning of this Russian politician and activist, and it is highly likely that he will prepare another on Mr Navalny's arrest and detention in January 2021.

21. According to data reported by Human Rights Watch, on 23 January the police arrested over 3,650 people who had demonstrated in Russia against the arrest of Alexei Navalny and corruption in the country⁵⁴. Excessive use of armed force by the police in these interventions was reported, even though the gatherings had been largely peaceful. Several people, including colleagues of Mr Navalny and activists, were placed in detention before and during the demonstrations. On 22 January, the lawyer Mikhail Benyash was arrested after posting a message on social media asking his colleagues to provide legal assistance to the detainees. Lyubov Sobol, a lawyer from the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) created by Mr Navalny, was also arrested while speaking to journalists during a demonstration. Then, on 10 February, a court in Moscow took a decision *in absentia* to place Leonid Volkov, a blogger and associate of Alexei Navalny living in Lithuania, in detention in proceedings in which he was charged with having incited minors to take part in demonstrations; later, an international warrant was issued for his arrest. Lastly, on 31 January 2021, members of the NGO Committee for the Prevention of Torture – Konstantin Gusev, Magomed Alamov, Ekaterina Vanslova, Sergey Shunin, Igor Kalyapin (winner of the Assembly's Human Rights Prize in 2011) and Timur Rakhmatulin – were arrested while observing demonstrations in support of Alexei Navalny in Pyatigorsk, Nizhny Novgorod and Orenburg⁵⁵.

22. The alert was also raised over a number of bills tabled in the State Duma in November 2020 which sought to place further restrictions on the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression by extending the legislation's scope to "foreign agents". I have already alerted the committee to this while preparing my report on "Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States". Further to my request, the committee requested an opinion from the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) at its meeting of 8 December. Some of these bills have already been passed by Parliament and were signed by President Vladimir Putin on 30 December 2020. It may be recalled that since 2014, NGOs receiving donations from abroad have been required to register as "foreign agents" with the Ministry of Justice⁵⁶. Following the latest changes in the law (Federal Law no. 481-FZ), private individuals (including non-Russian citizens in some cases) and groups of people (associations without the status of legal entities) must now register as "foreign agents" if they engage in "political activity" in Russia and receive funding from foreign countries, on the basis of a very broad definition⁵⁷. The law also obliges these people to regularly report on their activities, failing which they face a fine or a prison sentence of up to five years' imprisonment.

⁵⁰ See the Addendum to the report "The implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights", [Doc. 15123 Add.](#), 26 November 2020.

⁵¹ See [Decision 1377bis meeting](#), 1-3 September 2020 (DH) of the Committee of Ministers and Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2021)41 of 11 March 2021.

⁵² See the article [Russian Authorities Jail Poisoned Putin Critic](#), Human Rights Watch, 19 January 2021.

⁵³ See *Navalnyy v. Russia*, application no. 101/15, judgment of 17 October 2017. See also other judgments of the Court concerning oppression directed against the opposition figure: *Navalnyy v. Russia*, applications no. 29580/12 and others, 15 November 2018 and *Navalnyy v. Russia (no. 2)*, application no. 43734/14, 9 April 2019.

⁵⁴ See the article [Russia: Police Detain Thousands in Pro-Navalny Protests](#), Human Rights Watch, 25 January 2021. According to the Russian NGO OVD-Info, the number of people was at least 4,000. Furthermore, at least 5,754 people were arrested on 31 January and 1,512 were arrested on 2 February.

⁵⁵ See the urgent appeal from the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of 10 February 2020, *Russia: Arbitrary detention of seven members of the Committee Against Torture*.

⁵⁶ See my report on "Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States", *op. cit.*, paragraph 17.

⁵⁷ See FIDH, [Russia: New 'Foreign Agent' Legislation Will Further Undermine Civil Liberties](#), 7 January 2021.

A bill intended to regulate the status of “foreign agents” further (no. 1052525-7) is under consideration in the State Duma.

23. It should also be remembered that December 2019 saw the enactment of a law providing that any individual who receives foreign funding and creates or distributes media publications can be labelled as a media “foreign agent” (Federal Law no. 426-FZ). On 28 December 2020, for the first time on the basis of this law, five people were classified as “foreign agents”, including the famous human rights defender Lev Ponomarev, the Saint Petersburg activist Darya Apakhonchich, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Pskov Gubernia*, Denis Kamalyagin, and the journalists Lyudmila Savitskaya and Sergei Markelov.

24. In addition, several organisations and activists have been prosecuted under the 2015 law on “undesirable organisations” (Federal Law no. 129-FZ, subsequently amended)⁵⁸. They include Anastasia Shevchenko, the former regional co-ordinator of the *Open Russia* movement⁵⁹, who went on trial on 17 June⁶⁰. On 18 February 2021, a court in Rostov-on-Don found her guilty of “conducting activities of an undesirable organisation” and sentenced her to four years’ imprisonment, suspended⁶¹. Another former member of *Open Russia*, Iana Antonova, was found guilty on 2 October 2020 of “involvement in the activities of an undesirable organisation” and sentenced to 240 hours of community work.

25. Other cases of reprisals against human rights defenders have been reported over the last few months. On 29 September 2020, the sentencing of the historian and human rights defender Yuri Dmitriev, 64 years old, who is known for his research work and efforts to commemorate the victims of Stalinist repression, to 13 years’ imprisonment drew strong reactions. He was convicted by the Supreme Court of Karelia, at second instance, of “violent acts of a sexual nature against a person under the age of 14”, i.e. his adoptive daughter. The judge also referred the charges concerning “indecent assault without resort to violence against a person under the age of 16”, “production of child pornography” and illegal possession of weapons back to the court of first instance for reconsideration even though he had been acquitted of these charges.⁶² Furthermore, when Mr Dmitriev’s lawyer was unable to attend the appeal hearing for medical reasons, the judge refused to postpone the hearing. On this occasion, the Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, considered that Mr Dmitriev’s trial had not been fair and called on the Russian authorities to end its judicial harassment of civil society in Russia⁶³. She demanded the halting of criminal proceedings, which are still ongoing, against the editor Abdulmumin Gadzhiev, Yulia Tsvetkova, a women’s and LGBTI rights activist, and a human rights defender living in Sochi, Semyen Simonov⁶⁴. In July 2020, she criticised the sentencing to a large fine (of approximately EUR 6,000) of the freelance journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva, who had commented on a suicide attack during a radio broadcast in 2017, which amounted, in the eyes of the Russian authorities, to “publicly justifying terrorism”⁶⁵.

26. The Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed indignation over the attack by unknown persons on the lawyer Marina Dubrovina and the journalist Elena Milashina in Grozny (in the Chechen Republic) in February 2020⁶⁶ and asked the Russian authorities to carry out an appropriate investigation into the circumstances of this attack. In November, she also expressed concern over the disappearance of Salman Tepsurkayev, the 19-year-old chat moderator of the “1ADAT” news channel on Telegram, who was abducted by Chechen police officers in early September⁶⁷. It is to be noted that the situation is particularly troubling in

⁵⁸ For more information about the implementation of this law, see my report on “Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States”, *op. cit.*, paragraph 19.

⁵⁹ The *Open Russia* movement, which was founded by the opposition figure and former prisoner of conscience Mikhail Khodorkovsky and 30 foreign NGOs, was banned on account of being regarded as an “undesirable organisation” on 26 April 2017.

⁶⁰ See [Russia: Prisoner of conscience Anastasia Shevchenko’s trial starts](#), Amnesty International, 17 June 2020.

⁶¹ Amnesty International, *Russia. Prisoner of conscience Anastasia Shevchenko convicted, given suspended prison sentence*, 18 February 2021.

⁶² See FIDH, [Urgent Appeal](#) of 2 October 2020.

⁶³ See [Statement of the Commissioner for Human Rights](#) of 30 September 2020: *The authorities should end continuous judicial harassment of human rights defenders*.

⁶⁴ In relation to Semyen Simonov, a preliminary statement had already been released: [Statement of the Commissioner for Human Rights](#) of 20 July 2020: *Commissioner calls on Russian authorities to drop charges against human rights defender Semyen Simonov*.

⁶⁵ Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Russian authorities should remedy the long-standing problem of undue restrictions to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and press freedom*, 6 July 2020.

⁶⁶ Commissioner for Human Rights, *Commissioner calls on the Russian authorities to investigate assaults against journalist Elena Milashina and lawyer Marina Dubrovina in Chechnya*, 7 February 2020.

⁶⁷ See the [letter](#) that she sent to Mr Alexander Bastrykin, Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, on 19 November 2020.

the North Caucasus region, especially the Chechen Republic, as the Assembly pointed out in its [Resolution 2157 \(2017\)](#) “Human rights in the North Caucasus: what follow-up to [Resolution 1738 \(2010\)](#)?”⁶⁸; these issues are currently being looked into by our colleague Mr Frank Schwabe (Germany, Socialist Group), who is preparing a report on “The continuing need to restore human rights and the rule of law in the North Caucasus region”. In this context, it is also worrying that on 2 December 2020, Vanessa Kogan, the American director of the NGO *Justice Initiative*, who does a lot of work in relation to the human rights situation in the North Caucasus including the enforcement of the Court’s judgments on breaches of the Convention in this region, was notified of a decision on the revocation, for reasons of national security, of her permit to reside in Russia, where she has been living for 11 years. She is married to a Russian citizen, Grigor Avetisyan, who works for the same NGO and with whom she has two children. She subsequently appealed the decision to revoke her residence permit and lodged an application with the European Court of Human Rights alleging a breach of her right to family life (Article 8 of the Convention). On 11 December, the Court indicated an interim measure by asking the Russian authorities not to expel Mrs Kogan for the duration of the proceedings before it. On 2 February, it communicated this case to the authorities⁶⁹.

27. In Crimea, the repression of Tatar defenders continues. On 16 September, Server Mustafayev, the coordinator of a grassroots group called *Crimean Solidarity* which was created after Crimea was annexed by Russia, was sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment after being charged with belonging to a terrorist organisation and planning to “violently seize power”.⁷⁰ The Tatar human rights defender and president of the *Crimean Contact Group on Human Rights* in Yalta, Emir Usein Kuku, was sentenced on appeal to 12 years’ imprisonment on 25 June on similar charges.⁷¹

3.2.3. Turkey

28. Following the July 2016 attempted coup, prosecutions, arbitrary detention and threats targeting political opposition figures, journalists, human rights defenders and other members of civil society have intensified in Turkey⁷². A great many cases of reprisals were reported in 2020 and early 2021. To cite just a few examples, the case of Osman Kavala, a businessman and philanthropist, is first and foremost an illustration of the worrying situation of human rights defenders in the country. Osman Kavala has been kept in detention without having been convicted for over three years now. Although he was acquitted at first instance on 18 February 2020 of charges concerning an attempt to overthrow the Turkish government in relation to the events in Gezi Park in 2013 (Article 312 of the Criminal Code) and was due to be released thereafter, he was rearrested on the same day on the basis of charges relating to the attempted coup in 2016 (Article 309 of the Criminal Code). On 20 March 2020, the national court ordered his release in connection with the offence referred to in Article 309 of the Criminal Code, as he had already been detained for over two years for this offence (the maximum duration of pre-trial detention is two years). However, Mr Kavala was kept in detention, because, in the interim, the Prosecutor General’s Office had widened and deepened the investigation and submitted new evidence, this time of an offence under Article 328 of the Criminal Code (espionage). In October, he was formally charged with offences under Articles 309 and 328 of the Criminal Code. Two appeals disputing the lawfulness of his detention have been dismissed by the Constitutional Court (the second was dismissed on 29 December). On 22 January, Istanbul Court of Appeal decided to set aside the judgment passed by the court of first instance and acquitted him of the charges under Article 312 of the Criminal Code and referred to the case back to the court of first instance for reconsideration. On 5 February, Istanbul Assize Court decided to join this case with the one concerning the charges under Articles 309 and 328 of the Criminal Code and adjourned the hearing in this case until May 2021. This means that Osman Kavala is behind bars, despite the judgment handed down by the European Court of Human Rights on 10 December 2019, which held that his pre-trial detention was intended to reduce him to silence and act as a deterrent for other human rights defenders (a violation of Article 18 taken in conjunction with Article 5§1 of the Convention). This judgment called on Turkey to “[...] take every measure to put an end to the applicant’s detention and to secure his immediate release”.⁷³ In supervising the execution of this judgment, the Committee of Ministers has already

⁶⁸ Adopted on 25 April 2017. See also [Doc. 14083](#) of 8 June 2016, report by our former fellow Committee member Mr Michael McNamara, paragraphs 17 to 27.

⁶⁹ Application no. 54003/20.

⁷⁰ See [24 September 2020: Server Mustafayev sentenced to fourteen years in strict-regime correctional colony](#), Front Line Defenders.

⁷¹ See [30 June 2020: Military court of appeal upholds Emir Usein Kuku’s sentence of 12 years’ imprisonment](#), Front Line Defenders.

⁷² See *inter alia* the Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of 19 February 2020 on this subject, following her visit to Turkey from 1 to 5 July 2019.

⁷³ *Kavala v. Turkey*, application no. 28749/18, 10 December 2019, paragraph 240. The Court held that Turkey also violated Articles 5§1 and 5§4 of the Convention recognising the right to liberty and security.

taken three decisions and one interim resolution calling on the Turkish authorities to release the applicant immediately⁷⁴. The Assembly has done the same with its [Resolution 2347 \(2020\)](#) and [Resolution 2357 \(2021\)](#).

29. Furthermore, the trial against the chair of the Turkish branch of Amnesty International, Taner Kılıç, and the director of Amnesty International, İdil Eser, along with nine other human rights defenders, all accused of “belonging to a terrorist organisation”, has sparked several controversies. On 3 July 2020, Istanbul High Criminal Court sentenced Taner Kılıç to six years and three months’ imprisonment for “belonging to an armed terrorist organisation”.⁷⁵ Ms Eser, Günel Kurşun, a member of the *Human Rights Agenda Association*, and Özlem Dalkıran, a member of the *Citizens’ Assembly* organisation,⁷⁶ were sentenced to 25 months’ imprisonment for “knowingly and willingly aiding an armed terrorist organisation”.⁷⁷ These sentences were upheld on appeal, but an appeal on points of law has been lodged. In addition, the new trial of the human rights defenders Şebnem Korur Fincancı (President of the Turkish Medical Association and board member of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey), Erol Önderoğlu (a member of the Reporters without Borders NGO) and Ahmet Nesin (journalist) began on 3 February 2021, after their acquittal of July 2019 was overturned in November⁷⁸. The charges against them relate to their involvement in a 2016 campaign of solidarity in support of the right to freedom of the press and the Kurdish daily newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, which has since been shut down. Among other cases listed by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (“the Observatory”), on 16 November, Dr Serdar Küni, a renowned physician and human rights defender, was sentenced, after his case had been reconsidered, to four years and two months’ imprisonment for “belonging to a terrorist organisation” without any hard evidence apparently having been offered.⁷⁹ Lastly, on 17 February, the former editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, Eren Keskin, who is also co-president of the Human Rights Association (IHD), was sentenced to six years and three months’ imprisonment for the aforementioned offence (at first instance).⁸⁰ We point out that judicial proceedings have been lodged against her on over a hundred occasions.⁸¹

30. In addition, a new law on bar associations seeking to make them less independent was passed in July 2020. The Assembly’s Monitoring Committee has requested an opinion on this law from the Venice Commission. In September 2020, 47 lawyers were arrested and the Turkish Court of Cassation decided to uphold lengthy custodial sentences against 14 lawyers from the Progressive Lawyers’ Association who had been involved in cases “related to terrorism”. In addition, I am also deeply saddened by the death of the eminent Turkish human rights lawyer Ebru Timtik, who died in detention in Turkey on 29 August 2019 following a hunger strike lasting 238 days, which she waged in order to obtain a fair trial for herself and 18 other detained lawyers who were human rights defenders and members of the Progressive Lawyers’ Association. She had been sentenced to thirteen and a half years’ imprisonment for “belonging to a terrorist organisation”.⁸² Among the Association’s members, the lawyer Aytac Ünsal has also been detained since 2017 on terrorist charges. The Turkish Court of Cassation decided in September to suspend his imprisonment on health grounds. However, Aytac Ünsal was rearrested on 9 December 2020 to “prevent him leaving the territory” according to the allegations made by the Minister of the Interior, despite the critical state of his health and the Covid-19 health crisis.⁸³

31. A report by the Observatory of Human Rights Defenders and the Human Rights Association (IHD) published in July 2020 lists the restrictions affecting the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association in Turkey⁸⁴. The report states that activists participating in peaceful demonstrations have been “systematically targeted and repressed by the authorities” and charged with offences under Law no. 2911, which includes criminal provisions against demonstrators. In 2019, police officers intervened by force during

⁷⁴ CM/Del/Dec(2021)1398/H46-33, CM/Del/Dec(2020)1383/H46-22, CM/Del/Dec(2020)1377bis/H46-38 and Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2020)361 of 3 December 2020.

⁷⁵ For further information regarding Taner Kılıç, see the Front Line Defenders [article](#) about him.

⁷⁶ Citizens’ Assembly is an organisation that promotes peace, democracy and civil society in Europe. Özlem Dalkıran is also a founding member of Amnesty International in Turkey (see [here](#) for more details).

⁷⁷ For more details, see [10 July 2020: Four human rights defenders sentenced, seven acquitted in Büyükada case](#), Front Line Defenders.

⁷⁸ For more details, see the [Joint Statement](#) of Front Line Defenders, the Observatory and the Human Rights Association (IHD) of 1 February 2021.

⁷⁹ See the Observatory’s open letter of 15 January 2021 and the [Urgent Appeal](#) of 18 March 2020.

⁸⁰ Urgent Appeal from the Observatory of 17 February 2021.

⁸¹ [Urgent Appeal from the Observatory](#) of 28 May 2019.

⁸² See the Observatory’s [Urgent Appeal](#) of 28 August 2020.

⁸³ See the Observatory’s Urgent Appeal of 8 January 2021.

⁸⁴ For more details, read the [FIDH-OMCT Report](#) of 29 July 2020.

1,215 demonstrations and at least 3,980 demonstrators were placed in detention⁸⁵. It is principally defenders of LGBTI+ and women's rights, defenders of the environment or defenders who deal with the Kurdish question who suffer these reprisals.

32. Finally, the entry into force of the new law on "Preventing the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (Law no. 7262) on 31 December 2020 also poses significant threats to freedom of association and the activity of human rights defenders. This is because the new law includes provisions which enable the Minister of the Interior to appoint an administrator within organisations or suspend members where the latter are prosecuted for acts of terrorism. It also makes provision for a significant increase in administrative fines for organisations which collect donations through online platforms without obtaining permission in advance.⁸⁶ This legislation only places more obstacles in the way of the activities of human rights defence organisations, many of which have already been closed down on grounds of their alleged links with terrorism. In the light of these controversies, at my initiative, on 27 January, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights requested the Venice Commission for an opinion on this law.

3.2.4. Other cases of reprisals against human rights defenders

33. Cases where human rights defenders have faced intimidation have also been reported in other Council of Europe member States. According to the Observatory, in Poland, peaceful demonstrators opposed to a near-total ban on abortion pursuant to a Constitutional Tribunal judgment of 22 October 2020 were subjected to intimidation and excessive use of force by the authorities.⁸⁷ Over 600 journalists called on the authorities to refrain from deliberately obstructing the work of the media during these demonstrations. Furthermore, the journalist Agata Grzybowska was arrested and charged with "violating the physical integrity of a police officer" on account of having allegedly blinded a police officer with the flash on her camera.

34. In addition, defenders of migrant and refugee rights are still suffering reprisals in Italy and France. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, has spoken out against the criminalisation in Italy of eleven human rights defenders who assisted migrants in the Mediterranean (including Carola Rackete).⁸⁸ In addition, in Cyprus, the non-governmental organisation KISA, which works to promote migrants' rights and combat racism, was struck off the Register of Associations for allegedly failing to submit audited accounts and to hold statutory and electoral assemblies since August 2020.⁸⁹ Its case is not an isolated one, as more than 2,000 NGOs have been threatened with dissolution by the Minister of the Interior. Moreover, it had been convicted of "defamation" and "forgery" in June 2020, and its director, Doros Polykarpou, had been arbitrarily arrested on 2 August 2019.

35. Furthermore, in relation to Spain, I have also taken an interest in the situation and conditions of imprisonment of Mr Jordi Cuixart, president of the Omnium Cultural⁹⁰ association which was founded in 1961 under the Franco dictatorship. Omnium Cultural is an association that promotes civil and cultural rights in Catalonia. Mr Cuixart was arrested and placed in pre-trial detention on 16 October 2017 following events related to the Catalan independence referendum of 1 October 2017. In September 2019, the Supreme Court convicted him of sedition and sentenced him to nine years' imprisonment in the trial of twelve Catalan political and social activist leaders. According to his lawyers, the trial was political in nature and Mr Cuixart should not have been tried by the Supreme Court, which has jurisdiction to try elected officials and not civil society activists like him. According to the most recent information, Mr Cuixart's detention conditions have worsened because of the Covid-19 pandemic and he is being held in isolation in his cell for 23 hours a day.

4. Conclusion

36. The above examples show that human rights defenders are still suffering reprisals and intimidation and that their situation has not improved but has even worsened in certain Council of Europe member States, particularly Russia and Turkey. As general rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, I shall continue to pay close attention to the work of the bodies and institutions of the Council of Europe, including in particular the Venice Commission, which has been asked to provide opinions that are important from the viewpoint of rights defenders. I will also monitor the work of other international organisations in relation to this

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ For more information about the law, read the [Observatory's Statement](#) of 15 January 2021.

⁸⁷ See the Observatory's [Statement](#) of 23 December 2020.

⁸⁸ See the United Nations [Article](#) of 8 October 2020.

⁸⁹ See the Observatory's [Urgent Appeal](#) of 23 December 2020.

⁹⁰ To find out more, see: <https://omnium.eu/en/>.

subject and alert the committee and the Assembly to new cases of violations of the rights of human rights defenders and all new initiatives intended to protect them.