

NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE



Annual Report
2013



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Head of information Berit Nising Lindeman

Cover photo:
From parliamentary election observation in Norway 2013. Sergiy Tkachenko from Ukraine observed the Norwegian parliamentary election in Tromsø. Photo: Joakim Brattvoll

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Established in 1977

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) is a non-governmental organisation that works to promote respect for human rights, nationally and internationally. Its work is based on the conviction that documentation and active promotion of human rights by civil society is needed for states to secure human rights, at home and in other countries.

NHC bases its work on international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The main areas of focus for the NHC are the countries of Europe, North America and Central Asia. The NHC works irrespective of ideology or political system in these countries and maintains political neutrality.

How we work

Human rights monitoring and reporting

Through monitoring and reporting on problematic human rights situations in specific countries, the NHC sheds light on violations of human rights. The NHC places particular emphasis on civil and political rights, including the fundamental freedoms of expression, belief, association and assembly. On-site research and close co-operation with key civil society actors are our main working methods. The NHC has expertise in election observation and has sent numerous observer missions to elections over the last two decades.

Support for democratic processes

By sharing knowledge and with financial assistance, the NHC supports local initiatives for the promotion of an independent civil society and public institutions as well as a free media. A civil society that functions well is a precondition for the development of democracy.

Education and information

Through education and information about democracy and human rights, international law and multicultural understanding, we work to increase the focus on human rights violations. Our aim is to influence both public opinion and governments in human rights matters.

International processes

As with our educational work, the NHC seeks to influence governments and international organisations through participation in international processes, meetings and conferences to make human rights a priority.

Perspectives

The on-going struggle for democracy and human rights continues and came to a head in our part of the world on the streets of Kyiv this winter. In November 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich rejected a proposed new treaty with the EU in favor of closer ties with Russia. The decision sparked a motley protest movement that came to be known as the EuroMaidan, after the Maidan, the central square in Kyiv.

The Orange revolution in 2004 was one of the low points of Vladimir Putin's first presidency. Not only did the popular uprising against election falsification bring Western-oriented politicians to power in Kyiv, even more problematic was the example Ukraine set for the Russian polity: If the people take to the streets, they are able to bring down autocratic governments. The powerful Russian regime has therefore been wary of democratic movements in what Russia calls the "near abroad" and careful to marginalize opposition at home. The security services, media and courts have all been used as tools in trying to control the political landscape. Our partners in the human rights community in Russia have felt the effects of this machinery for years.

Nonetheless, demonstrations broke out in Russia in late 2011 after massive vote rigging during the federal parliamentary elections. The growth of a middle class not content with being clients of the ruling United Russia party and the spread of internet access, which helped people organize themselves, resulted in the biggest challenge to "Project Putin" so far. Our colleagues in the Russian election observation group Golos were instrumental in documenting the level of falsification. However, the demonstrations did not succeed in changing the political landscape in Russia, and the result has been an antidemocratic backlash. Among the first victims was Golos, which was convicted of violating a new law on NGOs for having been awarded the Sakharov Freedom prize from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 2011.

In Ukraine, Putin's ally Viktor Yanukovich succeeded in being elected president, but this winter Russia was unable to turn the tide in Ukraine. As a last resort, the Yanukovich regime

fired at the EuroMaidan activists, killing scores and wounding hundreds. That proved to be the last gasp. Yanukovich fled to Russia, currently on the run from justice. In the following days, militias took control over airports, established control posts all over Crimea and surrounded Ukrainian military bases. We all know the outcome: After an illegitimate referendum Russia has taken authority over Crimea, in sharp contradiction to international law, an expansionist move few had expected a few months ago.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has warned about the likely consequences of Putin's project since he made his political name by sending Russian military forces into Chechnya in 1999 in a manner that completely disregarded respect for human life and human rights. Moreover, all this time we have argued that Russia and Russian leaders should be held accountable - for crimes in Chechnya, for crimes in Georgia and for crimes against the many brave people who have tried to defend the Russian constitution.

The sanction regime currently being imposed on the Russian elite involved in crime is a positive step. They underline the Putin regime's disregard of the rule of law, a concern shared by many Russian citizens. The sanctions should in our view be complemented by independent criminal investigations of some of the grave crimes committed in Russia over the last years, as well as those crimes committed in Ukraine the last few months.

Standing on the Maidan after the Orange revolution almost ten years ago, I was convinced that I witnessed a momentous change. Although the gains appeared to evaporate swiftly, this winter has showed that the Orange legacy of people power lives on. There are many lessons to be learned. Perhaps we had too high hopes for Ukraine and the post-Soviet region ten years ago. But there are also lessons for the remaining autocrats of Europe. Rulers in a democracy risk being voted out of office, but those who rule by undermining democracy and human rights, risk a whole lot more.



Bjørn Engesland

Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General

The NHC Secretariat



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General



Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal
Deputy Secretary General.
Russia, Central Asia,
Turkey, international
criminal courts and justice



Fernanda Zubillaga Nilsen
Head of administration,
office management and
finance



Berit Nising Lindeman
Head of information.
Senior Advisor, Belarus
and Azerbaijan, election
observation



Anders Nielsen
Information Advisor.
Also responsible for the
EEA grants information
portal www.ngonorway.org



Aage Borchgrevink
Senior Advisor, Georgia.
Partly on leave in 2013



Ole B. Lilleås
Senior Advisor, Norway,
Western Balkans.
Co-ordinator of the
Norwegian NGO Forum
for Human Rights, Project
Manager for The Coalition
for Trust (from November).
IT management



Inna Sangadzhieva
Advisor, Russia and
Belarus.



Enver Djuliman
Senior Advisor, Head of
the human rights
education programme



Mina Skouen
Project manager,
Western Balkans and
LGBTI-related activities



Veronika Vimberg
Program co-ordinator,
Project Administration



Csilla Czibalmos
Project manager, Hungary,
Ukraine, Belarus and
Roma-related issues



Olga Shamshur
Project officer, South
Caucasus Project Coalition
for Trust and Natalia
Estemirova Documentation
Centre



Ivar Dale
Regional representative,
Central Asia, Almaty Office



Lene Wetteland
Advisor, Armenia, Central
Asia programme manager



Lillian Solheim
Project Manager, EEA
grants project



Ilya Udmelidze
Project co-ordinator,
Natalia Estemirova
Documentation Centre



Usam Baysaev
Project co-ordinator,
Natalia
Estemirova Documentation
Centre



Aleksandra Sidorenko
Project co-ordinator,
Natalia Estemirova
Documentation Centre

Staff abroad:



Adela Galešić
Regional youth
co-ordinator for Human
Rights Education in the
Western Balkans



Naida Huskanovic
Regional co-ordinator for
“Build Bridges, Not Walls”
project, Sarajevo



Meirgul Kudabayeva
Administrative Officer,
Central Asia regional
representative office,
Almaty



Elena Saenkova
Project co-ordinator,
Murmansk office

Organisation



Marion Kipiani
Regional program-coordinator of the project "Coalition for Trust" in South Caucasus, based in Tbilisi, Georgia



Mine Yildirim
Head of Project, The NHC Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey, based in Istanbul, Turkey

The organisational components of the NHC are the annual meeting, the board and the council. The annual meeting is our highest decision-making body, and consists of members of the council and the board. The board holds monthly meetings, where decisions relevant to NHC strategy, principles and financial matters are made. The Secretary General heads the secretariat, and is responsible for the daily operations of the NHC.

Board

Chairperson:

Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi
Human Rights Advocate with a special focus on Russia and Eastern Europe

Vice chairperson:

Julie Wilhelmsen
Research fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Hauk Lund

Executive director, Hauk Lund Consulting A/S

Eirik Moen

Secretary General of the International Democrat Union

Kari Schage

Management consultant, Resources Global Professionals

Ragni Ramberg

Lawyer at Østgård Wikasteen

Inger Skjelsbæk

Senior Researcher and Deputy Director at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Ole Benny Lilleås

Staff representative

Council

President:

Kristin Clemet
Vice president:
Anne Marit Bjørnflaten

Trond Bakkevig
Peter Batta
Helge Blakkisrud
Kjell Magne Bondevik
Bernt Bull
Nils Butenschøn
Juni Dahr
Ole Drolsum
Bente Erichsen
Anne Fjeld
Dankert Freilem
Grethe Fossum
Bjørn Cato Funnemark
Steinar Gil
Jacob M. Godzimirski
Trine Skei Grande
Bernt Hagtvet
Hans Morten Haugen
Anne Holt
Morten Høglund
Torbjørn Røe Isaksen
Prableen Kaur
Knut Kloster jr.
Idar Kreutzer

Berit Kvæven
Ragnhild Lied
Arne Liljedahl Lynngård
Elisabeth Løland
Mette Newth
Manuela Ramin Osmundsen
Victor Roddvik
Jan Tore Sanner
Per Saxegaard
Anne Julie Semb
Marianne B. Skou
Guro Slettemark
Lars Petter Soltvedt
Atle Sommerfeldt
Bjørn Stordrange
Nora Sveaass
Michael Tetzschner
Annette Trettebergstuen
Åshild Vige
Kåre Vollan
Magne Ove Warsinski-Varsi
Maria Warsinska-Varsi
Svein Wilhelmsen
Stein-Ivar Aarsæther

Activities in 2013

The NHC has a strong national and international commitment, with widespread activities in many countries. Our main focus is the human rights challenge in eastern Europe, but we also aim to be active human rights defenders in our own country, Norway. Through our expertise and the wide-ranging networks of our staff we follow developments closely, take action on urgent matters and have an extensive range of project activities.



The Russian Federation

The human rights situation in Russia has worsened since Vladimir Putin was re-elected President of the Russian Federation in May 2012. In 2013 a range of new repressive laws and policies entering into force made the space for independent media, civil society, and political opposition even smaller. The trials against the 6 May 2012 Bolotnaya square protesters, and several court cases against civil society organizations for failing to register as foreign agents throughout the year illustrated the limited space for protest and independent civil society.

The first human rights organization to be tried for failing to register as a foreign agent was Golos, a professional election observation organization and a promoter of electoral reform. Golos had been awarded the NHC Sakharov Freedom Award in 2012, but had declined to receive the prize money of \$10,000. In spite of this, a Moscow court found the

organization guilty and decided that both the organization and its leader Lilya Shibanova had to pay large fines (300,000 and 100,000 rubles respectively).

Several new law amendments were approved by the Russian Duma during the year: further limits on the freedom of expression and assembly, giving the Prosecutor General power to block internet sites without a court decision, imposing penalties for hurting religious feelings, and prohibiting propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations to minors ("anti-propaganda law").

According to the Human Rights Center Memorial, one of the most respected human rights organizations in the country and a close partner of the NHC, there are currently about 40 political prisoners in the country.



Court trial against Alexandra Dukhanina and other Bolotnaya square protesters.

» NHC activities

The NHC runs several comprehensive projects aiming at strengthening Russian human rights organizations, providing legal aid, monitoring human rights issues and educational activities. Project partners are to be found in western regions of Russia, including in the Barents region, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and in the North Caucasus.

In light of the restrictive legislation, the NHC had extensive discussions with partners about strategic and organizational issues during the year. The NHC published several articles, commentaries and other material about human rights developments in Russia. It arranged seminars and workshops with partners, and lobbied Norwegian and European politicians to raise human rights issues with Russian authorities.

Panel discussion at Anna Politkovskaya seminar (Irina Gordienko from Novaya Gazeta to the left).



NHC arranged an annual Anna Politkovskaya seminar in October 2013, focusing on the media situation in Sochi ahead of the Sochi Olympic winter games in February 2014 and in the wider North Caucasus region. An editor from Sochi and a journalist from Novaya Gazeta covering North Caucasus took part.

Russia's President Putin's birthday in October was marked by a slightly ironic celebrations in central Oslo, to which some of the victims of his regime were symbolically invited, among them members of Pussy Riot, Aleksandra Dukhanina, a Bolotnaya activist is house arrest in Moscow as well as others. The "party" was one of several events co-organised with Amnesty International Norway, environmental NGO Bellona and National Association for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LLH) protesting restrictive NGO law and the disputed homophobic anti-propaganda laws.

NHC challenged the Erna Solberg government in Norway, established in October 2013, to strengthening human rights policies related to neighboring and nearby countries, including the Russian Federation.

NHC traveled several times to Russia, met with partners, documented human rights issues, and took part in conferences and meetings. A few staff members, including Secretary General Bjørn Engesland, were still not able to travel to Russia due to ban on visa.

The NHC was active in preparations for the Sochi games, researching and drafting a handbook for journalists that was published in early 2014 together with other Norwegian

organizations active in Russia. It was also in co-operation with Caucasian Knot, a news portal co-operating with the NHC.

The NHC was an active supporter of the Justice for Sergei Magnitsky campaign, taking parts in events in the British and the European parliaments, writing articles and lobbying for political support of European Magnitsky legislation.

The NHC has about 15 partners in Russia, several of them among Russia's most influential and well-known human rights organizations. In spite of the increasingly repressive climate for human rights work, they were still able to cooperate with a few Russian governmental agencies on human rights education, police reform, monitoring of closed institutions, monitoring of hate speech and hate crime, and migration issues.

The NHC's Russian partners play important roles in reporting on human rights issues, providing recommendations to Russian authorities, international organizations and foreign states. Some of the partners are members of the President Human Rights Council or other state commissions.

Human rights work and independent journalism are particularly dangerous in the North Caucasus. Akhmednabi Akmednabiev, a journalist reporting for Caucasian Knot in Dagestan, was murdered on 9 July 2013, apparently for reporting on sensitive issues.

Stories from North Caucasus

After many years of providing human rights education and intercultural dialogue for young people in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia we have seen how fragments of painful memories seep into the conversation and seem to maintain distance and distrust between our participants. Listening from the outside it was so obvious that this pattern needed to be addressed, they needed to talk about it all.

The work of collecting and preserving memories from the people in the region began. Young volunteers were trained to do the interviews and collected stories from three generations of Chechen and Russian men and women. Many of the interviewees talked about their personal experiences for the first time and many of those who made the interviews knew little or nothing about the war from before. They told stories not only about experiences of war and loss, but of everyday life, memories of their lost loved ones and about their relationships with neighbours of different ethnic belonging.

The collection of memories eventually resulted in the book *Last to Know – Stories of a War / Каждый молчит о своем: истории одной войны*, was published as part of our programme for intercultural understanding and human rights in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia in co-operation with the Civic Assistance Committee.

In 2013 we also provided human right training for more than 250 young people and teachers. After the trainings the participants engaged in projects to disseminate in their local neighbourhoods what they had learnt: Human rights education for children, seminars on women's rights, publications which disseminate information about human rights and much more. Pilot courses for police officers were organised as well – discussing the link between good policing and respect for human rights. For the first time activities for journalists were included in the programme: training in investigative journalism was implemented with the Glasnost Defense Foundation.



Sabina Folnovic-Jaitner and
Tatevik Gukasyan presenting
Last to know – Stories of a war.

” We never talked about it all. Well, because it was in the news every day. And when it’s every day, you stop noticing it, it becomes routine..” says Arisha, a student from Moscow, remembering only faint TV fragments from her childhood. Hussein from Chechnya concludes: “What is the past? The past is what may overwhelm us tomorrow in a new wave. And if we don’t know the past, we can’t prevent disaster occurring in the future.” From “Stories of a War”



Alternative birthday celebration for President Putin at Egertorget.

NHC's Inna Sangadzhieva, Aage Borchgrevink and Berit Lindeman.



Bjørn Engesland interviewed.

Akhmed Gisaev.



Barents Programme

In the Barents region, the high northern border region between Russia and Norway, the NHC continued comprehensive education activities. With Barents Press, the NHC arranged several courses for journalists in the region, in Oslo and also via the internet. Together with partner organizations the NHC also managed to hold human rights schools for employees of the correctional services and seminars for police staff. We also organized training of trainers, human rights schools for people with special needs and those assisting them, regional and interregional schools for youth and teachers. One remarkable success was the establishment of a "Multicultural understanding and human rights course" at university level. More than 25 students participated in the course, and feedback showed that the course was of great interest both to students and to lecturers.

Belarus

In Belarus, President Lukashenko maintains a steady grip on the population. Civil society repression following the mass demonstrations and arrests in December 2010 continued to dominate in 2013, and we see little signs of the revival of protest actions against the oppressive regime. By the end of the year there were 11 political prisoners in the country, and several of them had already been in prison for many years. One of the opposition presidential candidates in 2010, Michail Statkevich, is one of them. Lukashenko has not stopped imprisoning his opponents; in 2013 two more were convicted who are considered political prisoners in Belarus. Our close friend and partner Ales Bialitaski, the Head of Human Rights Center "Viasna", remains in prison, serving a four-and-a-half-year sentence. Belarus is the only European country still with no moratorium on the death penalty. Although no-one was executed in 2013, at least three were given death sentences during the year.

NHC staff could not travel to Belarus in 2013 as we have been denied entry by the authorities.

Human rights education programme in Belarus

The NHC has for several years conducted a human rights education programme in Belarus. At the end of 2012 we started a new three-year project with educational activities directed towards young people, activists, journalists and women. By means of seminars, lectures and round-table discussions we are contributing to greater knowledge and awareness about human rights in general, activism, journalists' rights, women's rights, and domestic violence in particular.

In a general climate where civil society organizations are threatened, harassed and intimidated, where representatives are often bullied and imprisoned, our partners show an impressive amount of resilience and adaptability in their work to achieve their goals.



New experiences at children's hospice.

They say that a picture can say a thousand words. This is true in the case of one of the participants in our human rights trainings for journalists. Besides his regular work as a journalist, he volunteers his time as photographer at a children's hospice that assists terminally-ill children and youth. It gives them and their families a chance to spend some time away from home in secure and safe surroundings. His camera lens captures not only the faces of these children happy to experience something new, but also a story of a greater significance in terms of human recognition and compassion.

Michail Statkevich



Ales Bialiataski



Happy 51st birthday to Ales Bialiataski.



Human recognition.

» Activities

Repression of Belarusians, including some of our friends, contacts and partners, dominated much of our activity and concern in 2013, and the NHC published several statements to this effect.

In January the NHC presented a collection of short documentaries by local film makers about present and former political prisoners in Belarus on YouTube and on our website. The intention of the documentaries was to present the persons behind the names of the prisoners to a local as well as an international audience. We believe this is important to understand why we must continue to struggle for their release.

The campaign to move the World Ice Hockey Championship planned for Minsk in 2014 to another host country, in co-operation with other NGOs, lasted until May when the International Ice Hockey Federation confirmed Belarus as a host of the championship. Plans were made for an advocacy campaign before and during the May 2014 championship event.

In August we organized a presentation of the English version of Anatoly Lebedko's biographical book, "108 days in a KGB dungeon". Lebedko, leader of the opposition party United Civic Party in Belarus, was arrested in connection with the protests of 19 December 2010 and kept a diary while jailed for 108

days. At the presentation, Lebedko was accompanied by Andrei Kim, a Belarusian youth activist who helped explain the current situation in Belarus.

Together with a group of human rights NGOs from several European countries, the NHC sent a letter to EU foreign ministers. The letter urged the EU to extend and expand its targeted economic sanctions against Belarusian companies that provide support to the authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenka by exporting to and through the EU.

We have co-operated with Belarusian civil society for years, and in 2013 we were proud supporters of the award-winning Belarusian Free Theatre (BFT), led by Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin. BFT creates unique theatre because of its innovative approach to urgent and challenging social and political issues – with emphasis on the last dictatorship in Europe – Belarus. The NHC invited Natalia Kaliada to speak at the Oslo Freedom Forum in May.

We also support one of the most-read news websites in Belarus, www.charter97.org. Both the staff of BFT and Charter '97 have been forced to establish outside Belarus after the 2010 repressions.

“I am extremely concerned that the political prisoners who have languished in prison for almost three years under terrible circumstances, are slowly being forgotten by Europe. Effective sanctions are the best tool we have to hand, they should be strengthened, not weakened, until the prisoners are released and Lukashenka truly improves his record of human rights in Belarus,” Bjørn Engesland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee said.

NHC representatives were regularly asked to be speakers at seminars and act as experts in the media on Belarus issues.

Andrei Kim and Anatoly Lebedko.



Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin.



Ukraine

While the last few years represented a general downside for Ukraine's human rights and democratic processes, 2013 ended with the uncertainty created by mass protests. The protests against President Yanukovich and his government started in late November 2013 after he turned away from a negotiated Association Agreement with the European Union on 21 November. An estimated 100,000 protesters gathered in the streets of Kiev. Police tried to disperse the demonstrations by force, injuring and detaining many of the protesters. Images of injured demonstrators led to further mobilization of protest and international reaction.

In December 2013 several hundred thousand attended demonstrations. The Maidan Square in central Kiev was transformed into a tent city, and Kiev city hall was taken over by protesters. In an effort to win over Ukraine to its own plans for a Eurasian free trade union, Russia offered on

17 December to buy USD 15 billion worth of Ukrainian Eurobonds and to reduce gas prizes by a third. The deal was heavily criticized by the opposition for being against Ukraine's national interests, while Western media and economic experts said it would not solve Ukraine's deeper economic problems. Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko remained in jail at the turn of the year. She is widely perceived as a political prisoner, also by the European Court of Human Rights.

Ukraine held the 2013 chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and an OSCE ministerial meeting was organised at the beginning of December, just as the mass protests were gathering force. The NHC was a member of the Civil Solidarity Network civil society meeting at the fringes of the OSCE event.



NHC's Ivar Dale in Kiev in December.

Mass protests.



Barricades near Maidan Square.





Equality March in Kiev

» Activities

The NHC introduced a new project on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex persons (LGBTI) in Ukraine in 2013. Over the next three years, we will be working on promotion of LGBTI rights by strengthening civil society, advocating against all discriminatory legislation and challenging homophobic and transphobic attitudes among the general population. Ukraine's forthcoming political changes may provide a momentum for positive change. This will require continued political pressure from the international community, so that the battle for LGBTI rights will not get lost in the political uncertainties.

We participated in Ukraine's first ever Equality March, which was successfully held in Kiev on 25 May 2013, although it had initially been banned. An alternative route was approved out of the city centre, and about 100 participants walked a short distance guarded by a wall of armed police. Opposing was a vast number of counter-demonstrators trying to attack the march. Protests were organized in several other towns as well, and in social media unidentified people encouraged attacks on people attending the parade – publishing pictures of them.

The NHC has expressed its concerns about the proposals for legislation criminalizing all forms of so-called "homosexual propaganda", similar to a Russian law; hate crimes and hate speech are widespread, and the many questions relating to gender identity rights remain unaddressed.



Klaus Bøckman, NHC's
Mina Skouen, Arfinn
Nordbø and Bjørnar
Buhaug at Equality
March in Kiev.

South Caucasus

Project Coalition for Trust in the South Caucasus

The Coalition for Trust is a three-year project funded by the European Commission – with co-financing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. It is a co-operation with local partner organizations in all entities of the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, as well as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Our common aim is to restore people-to-people contacts and trust within and between societies divided by violent conflict. To do so, we carry out a comprehensive education programme for students, media professionals and those engaged in civil society that will build their capacities in human rights questions, cross-cultural dialogue, transitional justice, advocacy and public outreach, as well as confidence-building. The project's education component will lay the foundation of a regional network of peace activists engaged in and supporting the rebuilding of trust across borders and conflict divides in the South Caucasus. The Coalition will be supported by public engagement and advocacy work, building up from the local level to regional and international levels.

” I liked the inter-activity of the seminars ... I received many professional recommendations which will be very useful in my journalistic activities.”
Natia Amiranishvili,
a journalist
participating in the seminars in Georgia.



NHC's Marion Kipiani and Artak Kirakosyan, CSI, Armenia.



Workshop in Aghveran, Armenia.

During 2013, we worked with more than 250 young people, journalists and human rights defenders, engaging them in debate on how human rights can be viewed as elements of conflict transformation, and how intercultural tolerance and understanding can be cornerstones for the peaceful resolution of conflict at multiple levels. Participants were very involved and highly motivated in the seminars.

Partner conference in Antalya.

Marion Kipiani and Enver Djuliman at partner conference in Antalya.



Workshop during conference.





Post-election demonstration in Yerevan.

Armenia

In the volatile South Caucasus, small Armenia tends to be left mainly to itself by the international community. However, widespread intolerance towards those who act or behave outside set norms and serious human rights challenges remain in the country. They include torture and abuse in police stations and other closed institutions including the military, self-censorship or lack of independence in the media, extensive misuse of administrative resources during campaigning and elections and a deep distrust of governmental institutions.

Negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Armenia and the EU have been going on since 2010 and a final signature was expected when the re-elected President Serge Sargsyan unexpectedly made a U-turn in September and instead signed an agreement with the Russian Federation, leading the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union. There is a need for further principled engagement with the authorities of Armenia and an increase in citizens' participation in society.

» Activities

The NHC's democracy support programme contributes to the development of civil society in Armenia through co-operation with, and financial support for, five NGOs with varying approaches, close follow-up of events in the country and international advocacy. Most important, however, is the work our partners do in order to document human rights abuses and develop critical thought and tolerance in the districts of Armenia, far from the capital Yerevan.

The Armenian Helsinki Committee, for example, gathers groups of activists and journalists in various parts of the country for workshops on human rights, activism and journalism: In Armavir in northern Armenia, the group decided to investigate the problem of children who drop out of school. Summing up the findings in a regional TV programme, an unprecedented discussion evolved between local governmental bodies, police, locally operating NGOs and the monitoring implementation group. It determined what the various institutions do and should do to secure education for all children, drawing upon each others' expertise. The short film later won an

award as "Disclosed Reality" in a contest organised by the local UN office.

In Lori, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor trains young lawyers and law students in the smaller towns of the region and involves them in work to find information about torture and abuse in police stations, and interviews the population about their relationship with the police. In April the NHC and partner CSI submitted a joint mid-term assessment on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Armenia, pointing in particular to remaining issues regarding justice reform.

During elections, the NHC's partners carry out documentation and analysis and involve young volunteers and activists as volunteers after training and workshops on human rights and election monitoring. In 2013 Armenia organised both a presidential election and election to the Yerevan Council of Elders and the position of Mayor. The NHC assisted on-site in Armenia.

An NHC and partner roundtable in May marked that one year had passed since serious hate crimes took place in Armenia against the LGBT

community, which suffers discrimination. Similarly, the NHC co-signed a letter to the Armenian President in September, reminding him of the international obligations to protect human rights defenders working on gender issues after such organisations faced direct threats and harassment.

The NHC and local partners develop recommendations and present them to the international community, for example in meetings with the

Armenian Helsinki Committee workshop, Yerevan.





Pre-election picket in Yerevan.

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the EU's EEAS office in Brussels.

The media is an important part of civil society and a source of information for the population, and in 2013 the NHC also supported the Caucasus Institute's programme for young journalists and students. Students on the programme are conscious of why they have chosen the CI's focus on social and political reporting rather than the university's general programme, and many of them later find work in regional independent news outlets or organisations.

The NHC visited Armenia several times in 2013 and finalised research for a report on civic activism in Armenia from the 2008 disputed elections until the latest developments in connection with the Customs Union. The report, *Armenia: Between Hope and Distrust*, was published in early 2014.

Azerbaijan

The human rights challenges in the oil and gas rich South Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan are serious, and worsening by the year. President Ilham Aliyev, who took over as head of state after his father, rules a state rife with manipulated elections, corruption and abuse of power.

Independent journalists, opposition politicians, young activists and human rights defenders are targets for arrest, harassment and unfounded civil cases. Two murders of journalists are still not solved. Azerbaijan has more than 100 political prisoners, among them 11 journalists and bloggers, two human rights defenders and 11 youth activists, along with members from the political opposition.

Anar Mammadli, head of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), Baku, was arrested and given a three-month pre-trial detention at the Nasimi District Court in Baku. Mammadli and his organisation have been organising nationwide election observations in Azerbaijan since 2000. The latest election in Azerbaijan, the presidential election, was marked by flagrant violations of political pluralism and freedom of information. President Ilham Aliyev's re-election by an overwhelming majority on 10 October 2013 was considered "seriously flawed". The daily newspaper *Azadliq*, one of the few remaining opposition news outlets, is now in danger of succumbing to efforts to throttle it financially.

Anar Mammadli.



» Activities

At the beginning of the year we pushed for the adoption of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) resolutions calling on Azerbaijan to improve its deteriorating human rights record. While a strong monitoring report was indeed adopted, PACE dismissed a report on political prisoners. The NHC believes this vote presents serious challenges to individual members of PACE's commitment to democracy and human rights promotion.



Ilgar Mammadov.

Protest actions during the spring led to many arrests and prominent opposition leader Ilgar Mammadov, who had planned to run for the presidency, was arrested together with Musavat Party deputy chairman Tofiq Yaqublu.

Tofiq Yaqublu.



They were charged with staging riots in the town of Ismayilli, even though they had clearly had nothing to do with those local protests. The NHC voiced its protest over the cases, and also included them in our recommendations to the Government of Norway on human rights cases to be focused upon in the United Nations organs. Similarly, we called on the UN Human Rights Council member states to hold Azerbaijan accountable during its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 30 April for its failure to protect basic human rights. A joint letter from the NHC and several human rights NGOs to the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prosecutor, General Zakir, expressed a profound concern regarding the continued harassment and intimidation of investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova.

Khadija Ismayilova.



Through our European Platform for Democratic Elections network we expressed serious concern at the surprise statement by delegations from the European Parliament and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly following the elections, where they concluded that they had observed a "free, fair and transparent electoral process". They did this despite the widespread and reliable reports of fraud, pressure against voters and other manipulations. We also protested against the intimidation of its member organization, the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS) in Baku and later at the arrest of its leader, Anar Mammadli. We immediately brought his case up with international actors, Norwegian parliamentarians and the Norwegian foreign ministry.

”The election will not be credible unless people are free to criticise the government. Azerbaijan should take immediate action to ensure fundamental rights are protected ahead of the election, including by releasing journalists, political activists and human rights defenders.”
Secretary General Bjørn Engesland, on the eve of the presidential elections.

Georgia

The Parliamentary elections in Georgia on 1 October 2012 resulted in a peaceful transfer of power from the ruling National Movement (NMU), headed by President Mikheil Saakashvili, to the opposition coalition Georgia's Dream (GD), headed by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. The peaceful and orderly presidential election of 27 October 2013 reinforced Georgia's position as the most democratic corner of the post-Soviet Caucasus.

The transfer of power paved the way for resolving some of the country's main human rights issues. Political prisoners have been released, and a large number of other prisoners who may have been unfairly tried and sentenced, have had their sentences commuted, reduced or overturned. The media has been relatively free and human rights defenders have not been threatened or harassed. Former officials who have been involved in serious crimes, such as torture, have been prosecuted.

Political polarization remained, however. Former NMU officials have been investigated for alleged crimes committed while they were in power. Although the charges are serious and in most cases appear well founded, there have been procedural irregularities in some cases, including allegations of attempts to fabricate evidence by coercing witnesses. A number of officials on the local level have been dismissed, sometimes apparently on political grounds. Unfortunately, there has been no progress in the investigation of the August 2008 war with Russia, and there has been no progress toward resolving the conflict with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which remain under de facto occupation by Russia. Large ethnic Georgian populations from these regions remain internally displaced in Georgia.

Tbilisi



» Activities

The NHC worked with our main partners the Georgia Human Rights Center (HRC) and the Caucasian Centre for Conflict Studies and Human Rights, on a three-year project aimed at providing free legal aid, running an information programme based on the website humanrights.ge, monitoring human right violations and conducting international advocacy. The project ended in November 2013.

Ucha Nanuashvili, former head of the HRC, was appointed Georgia's new Public Defender (Ombudsman) by the country's parliament in December 2012. The Public Defender is the national human rights institution in Georgia. The NHC's Aage Borchgrevink accepted a seat on the international advisory board of the Public Defender. Nanuashvili visited Oslo in March 2013 in order to meet the Norwegian Ombudsman and the MFA represented by State Secretary Torgeir Larsen. Nanuashvili thanked Norway for supporting civil society which played a vital role in achieving a peaceful transfer of power in Georgia.



Ucha Nanuashvili.

The NHC has focused on the lack of investigations after the war of 2008, in which grave violations of humanitarian law were committed by both sides, Georgia and Russia, in the form of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Based on fieldwork in November 2012, the NHC also published a short report on the lack of investigation of the Lopota affair in August 2012, where a number of irregular militants (apparently trained and equipped by Georgian security and military structures) and three Georgian servicemen were killed. The NHC had meetings with the Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili and other officials on this matter.

As Georgia is a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the NHC has argued that the ICC should assume a more proactive role and try to ascertain whether results are feasible, given the lack of progress from the two parties. During the project period, three reports have been presented to the ICC Office of the Prosecutor.

Central Asia

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is one of a few Norwegian NGOs to be engaged in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Since 2006, we have had a representative office in Central Asia, currently based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with one regional representative sent from Oslo and one local administrative assistant. The office of the regional representative is involved in civil society activities, maintains a broad stakeholders' network, monitors court hearings and demonstrations, and other relevant events in Almaty in particular. The representative also frequently travels to other parts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to follow up events there. Unfortunately, as a human rights organisation we are denied access to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, but we strengthen focus on human rights issues in these countries by means of advocacy campaigns.



Ivar Dale in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



Natalya Shabunts.

Turkmenistan remains one of the most closed and repressive states in the region and in the world; civil society is non-existent. Nonetheless, a few activists manage to put the country on the agenda, and one of them is Natalya Shabunts. Though a severed sheep's head was placed on her doorstep to scare and intimidate her, she continues her brave work. She visited Norway in October by invitation from the NHC to share her concerns with Norwegian institutions.

A co-operation between activists in Turkmenistan and the NHC resulted in the report "Women: Turkmenistan's Second-Class Citizens", published in June. Brave women's rights activists had gathered information from women all over the country over several years, and as it would risk their future work to publish the report under own names, the NHC added to and edited the report and published it to an international audience. The report gives a unique insight into women's everyday life in the closed country, and an earlier version was also submitted to the hearing of Turkmenistan in the CEDAW last year.

We joined an international campaign called "Prove They Are Alive", urging the Turkmen authorities to inform relatives about the fate of people who have been imprisoned incommunicado for 10 years or more. The campaign also includes Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, a democracy activist who despite having political asylum in Norway returned to Turkmenistan after the death of the previous president and was immediately arrested. His family has received no verified information about him since 2008.



Women in Turkmenistan.

Uzbekistan shares the lowest rankings in several of the international human rights and democracy indexes with Turkmenistan, and has seen no progress in the human rights field over the last year. Believers who adhere to so-called non-traditional religions are subject to harassment, and a large number of Muslims who frequent mosques other than the officially approved ones are facing long prison sentences on trumped-up charges of extremism. Homosexual relationships are still illegal. The large repressed population has no outlet for frustration, and there are great concerns as to what might be developing under the surface.

In connection with the UN Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in April, the NHC submitted



Old men relaxing in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.



Samarkand, Uzbekistan.



Boys playing in Samarkand



Audience in Kurgan Tyube.

alternative reports that were frequently referred to in the Stakeholders Summary Report. We were also present at the UPR hearings in Geneva. On the fringes of the hearings the NHC shared recommendations and concerns with media and diplomatic delegations.

In November, the NHC was present in **Tajikistan**, when long-term president Emomali Rakhmon received 84% of the votes and was re-elected as president in an electoral process that did not allow for any real competition. Whereas a large number of men still travel abroad to make money, the situation for women in the patriarchal country is deteriorating, and an increasing number of girls are taken out of school as education is not seen necessary for them.

Small initiatives such as this that help to develop an understanding for human rights in the general population are made possible through the small grants fund that the NHC has been offering to NGOs in Central Asia for seven years. With financial support from the Norwegian MFA and the National Endowment for Democracy, the NHC has selected an average of seven NGOs each year from between 2-300 proposals. For example, the focus has been on rule of law in Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 Osh events and political rights in Kazakhstan after the 2012 Zhanaozen events in the last year. In Tajikistan programmes have supported work amongst the so-called second wives and their children, who have few legal rights. We seek to support initiatives in the districts rather than the larger cities, and develop smaller NGOs that can do more with less money.



NHC's team Ivar Dale and Lene Wetteland in Khujand, Tajikistan.



Ivar Dale on the road to Khujand, Tajikistan.

Khujand on election day and day of constitution, Tajikistan.



In Kurgan-Tyube in southern Tajikistan, the NHC is funding the NGO Tomiris. It arranges mobile theatre in rural villages and farming fields in order to put the issues of human rights in general and children and girls' rights in particular on the agenda. Through small performances they stage scenes depicting challenges familiar in the audiences' daily lives. Volunteers from the region are taught human rights and acting skills, and then perform the small scenes. Afterwards the audience engages in lively debates.

Mobile theatre Kurgan Tyube.





Ivar Dale presents award at the human rights film festival Bir Duino in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, NGOs and activists are actively involved in national processes like the development of the National Preventive Mechanism on torture or working groups on various draft laws and strategies. Although Kyrgyzstan is seen as the democratic leader in the region and many positive initiatives are taken, serious issues still remain. The mass killings in the southern city of Osh during a riot in 2010 and its consequences are still sensitive issues. It is problematic to bring it up to this day, and complicates the situation for various minorities in the country.

The NHC, the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, the Stefanus Alliance and Forum 18 co-operate on a programme aimed at improving the situation for religious minorities in the country. The Oslo Center and the NHC have established good working relations with the relevant Kyrgyz authorities on this issue, and through dialogue meetings and a study visit to Norway in October discussed alternative ways of reaching the wanted security objectives without compromising human rights.

Visiting the Ahmadiya mosque in Oslo.



Workshop in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan.



Ahmadiyas in Oslo and state commission on religion from Kyrgyzstan.



Aza Abdurasulova and Ivar Dale, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



Kyrgyz officials reading report on Osh events.



Near the city of Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan.

After the Law on Religious Groups in **Kazakhstan** was revised in 2011 and required all religious groups to re-register within a year, there has been increased pressure on religious believers in 2013, with imprisonments and fines. A pastor and an atheist were in separate cases even forcefully admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Journalists and political activists continue to face restrictions, arrests and harassment in Kazakhstan while the authorities continue their international campaign for international investment as a tolerant, developed country. In response to this approach, the NHC and Freedom House Kazakhstan in October published the report “Kazakhstan: Cunning democracy”, analysing the current situation for democracy in the country. This was also discussed with representatives of Kazakh authorities during a side-event at the OSCE Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. The report describes the situation behind the polished façade regarding freedom of religion or belief, expression and assembly.



Kazakhstani OMON police.



Ivar Dale visiting partners in Shymkent, Kazakhstan.



NHC's Ivar Dale, Igor Vinyavskiy, Viktoria Tiuleneva and Sergei Duvanov in Almaty, Kazakhstan.



Western Balkans

Almost 20 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to four years of war the Western Balkans is still struggling with the aftermath: ethnic tension, denial of war crimes and political stagnation. Recent images of burning buildings and riots depict disappointment, distrust in the political system and a population which has had enough of corruption and unemployment and inefficient institutions.

In the middle of this a frustrated new generation of young people are growing up, living their lives surrounded by sites where severe war crimes took place and not even knowing about it. They do not learn anything about it at school and

their understanding of the recent past is based on facts mixed with rumour and political propaganda. This situation effectively contributes to a climate where conflict-entrepreneurs take advantage of distrust and frustration, and this hinders development of a society with respect for peace, fundamental human rights and democracy.

The NHC has been working on human rights in the Western Balkans since the mid-nineties. Human rights education has been a core component of all our 2013 projects.

Enver Džuliman with students.



” We are all born as persons, yet have to develop into citizens. When I say a citizen, I think of individuals who are aware of their rights and obligations within the society in which they live. To achieve that, they need knowledge. That is obtained by asking questions: First ask ourselves and then others, which in turn helps us in our daily quest to get free of prejudices about others. It is the knowledge that connects people rather than keeps them apart, the knowledge built on ethos and not ethnos. It explains, yet does not justify, it speaks of reality as that reality is, but it also speaks of what the reality should be.”
Enver Đuliman, Human Rights Education programme, NHC

The Role of universities in peacebuilding

The NHC continued with its initiative to define the role of universities in peacebuilding by organizing events at partner universities and faculties in Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Novi Sad (Serbia) and Pristina (Kosovo). We established human rights corners at the university libraries in Novi Sad and Tuzla and organized regional student exchanges between the member universities. Moreover, we continued lessons on human rights and intercultural understanding in co-operation with the partner universities in the region, both for full-time students and professionals with degrees.

We paid special attention to organizing the regional exchange between students from the partner universities in Kosovo and Serbia. They learned about higher education and youth in Serbia, about multicultural community of Vojvodina, about history, nationalism and conflict transformation but also the role of art in dealing with past. Besides participating in joint education activities, the students also had chance to visit the government of autonomous region of Novi Sad.

We updated a compendium of relevant literature for students, and added several of the best essays written by students who had completed our courses. The compendium and essays were published and disseminated among our project partners, in various peacebuilding networks as well as on our Facebook page.



Transitional Justice at Universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

“How shall our state and society deal with the past war and the crimes committed? We all know that perpetrators live in our communities along with their victims. We can see how our politicians deny known crimes and refer to criminals as heroes. How can Bosnia and Herzegovina develop efficient policies to deal with this past so that society can develop peacefully to the benefit of its population?”, Aleksandra Letic from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, asks students who have gathered from the country’s main universities at a Bijeljina hotel in the county’s north-eastern corner.

They have come to learn more about Transitional Justice, in other words, what different ways there are to fulfill the rights to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence after mass violations of human rights.

The project has been running for five years. What we have wished is to use the experience from small groups to develop curricula and content that can be used by universities as part of their regular education of critically important professional groups. Our curriculum has already been taught to law students at a private university with excellent results, but to reach further will require continued efforts at each of the universities. Thanks to the project, work can start from a higher level. Now there are lectures, textbook articles, tested curricula, resource persons within universities and a cadre of trained students on which to build. New links have been forged between universities and civil society organizations, which is unusual in the country but critically important to transitional justice as much expertise on the topic is found in civil society organizations. The joint efforts of the professors in developing the textbook and curricula have forged new links between universities in this divided society as well. The project’s strategic approach and results have attracted support from Switzerland, Germany and the USA for additional efforts aimed at the same goal of educating the next generation of Bosnians in transitional justice. As the project has developed, new universities have asked to be included in the project.

” In a way, that summer camp influenced my further career. I am a psychologist and psychotherapist working with people who have war experience. I am one of the managers of a peacebuilding organization. I am talking to people who had traumatic experiences on a daily basis. We are trying to understand what it looks and feels like to see things from another perspective. This learning process is sometimes very hard and painful. This form of work changes people. We have a chance to see the bigger picture. To see shades of grey, rather than black and white only. We become more human. Our points of view are changing and we are becoming witnesses of deconstruction of our view of ‘reality’. We become gentler and more sensitive. We learn to see people behind their actions. We lose some of our prejudice.”
Milicia Jakšić, Novi Sad

Human rights education for active citizenship in the Western Balkans

In December 2013, the NHC's oldest human rights programme came to an end. More than a decade has passed since we brought together young people of different ethnicities in the Western Balkans for the first time. Since then we have had more than 10,000 young people all over the region taking part in our human rights schools at local and regional levels. Returning to their local communities they have formed human rights youth groups and carried out projects to make sure that what they have learnt will also impact on their peers and surroundings. A participant from Montenegro describes her experience with our programme as a fundamental experience in her life, which she says can be divided in "...before and after the school!"



Human rights education for active citizenship.



Peace education on location
team meeting with the organization
White Buses in Oslo



Bjørn Engesland
at the
University of
Tuzla

”Tolerance and understanding of others is individual and it depends on the capacity of your brain, but the chance in this area to see things differently from when I was just a kid, to meet some people about which I heard only bad things, and to see that they are not bad, was priceless. It was a wonderful chance to learn that you can't generalise when it comes to people.”
Siniša Serdar,
Beograd

Methodology and education materials have been tailored to the programme, teachers and trainers know how to use it and even conservative institutions have given access to our activities within the formal education system.

In early 2000 many of the young people we invited to the programme had never met a person from another group, and their impressions of the others were based on propaganda and their personal experiences from the war. Even the task of initiating a dialogue between them was challenging. Discussing the controversial facts from the wars, denial of war crimes, interreligious understanding and human rights issues concerning minority groups such as sexual and gender minorities was also fraught with difficulties.

More than 10 years on, many young people now dare to challenge denial of war crimes, ultra-nationalistic movements, homo- and transphobia and discrimination of Roma minorities. They dare to visit places where severe war crimes took place, and speak openly about what they see. They are the walking and talking images of what we have achieved.



Peace education on location.



Visit to the Falstad centre.

Memorial in the forest at Falstad centre.



Peace Education on Location

In 2013 we initiated the project “Peace Education on Location” in co-operation with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska. We challenge how the presentation of personal history impacts a local community. Denial of living memories has the potential for instigating new conflict, but these same memories may provide space for learning about peace and reconciliation. High school students and teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina meet witnesses from the war and local community leaders, and hidden narratives will be part of the history that young people learn about their surroundings.

The Falstad centre outside Trondheim, the former camp from the Second World War, has become such a reminder of the Norwegian war events – exhibitions and a memorial in the forest is combined with a comprehensive human rights education programme for young people. The Peace Education on Location project team members visited the centre to see examples of how the process of dealing with the past has been dealt with in Norway since the end of the Second World War.

” My first contact with ‘real life’ democracy and working within a group of equals, sharing ideas and experiences happened in a very natural and unconstrained way. Through this I have learnt more about others, their religions, cultures, life in general and I have also learnt more about myself. I also broke down a lot of prejudices during that week and know how to deal with them in the future, which is what I consider one of the most important accomplishments.”
Zulejha Zatrić, Human Rights School in Vrnjačka Banja

Turkey

Monitoring the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey

The right to freedom of religion or belief remains a key right for the democratization process in Turkey. Despite a general constitutional protection afforded to the right to freedom of religion or belief, a legal framework that is compatible with international human rights standards is still not in place. Effective protection of this right for all, including members of the majority, minorities as well as non-believers, remains a challenge. The obligations to observe the principle of neutrality and ensure pluralism have yet to be fulfilled.

Our new project – the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief Monitoring Project – funded by the Norwegian foreign ministry focuses on monitoring and reporting on this key right for all in Turkey with the purpose of advancing its protection. The project is led by Mine Yildirim, an Ankara-based Turkish expert in the field and the one who initiated The Freedom of Belief Initiative (İÖG).

Since its start in March 2013, there has been a focus on establishing relations with religious or faith communities, human rights organizations, universities as well as public authorities in order to raise awareness on the situation

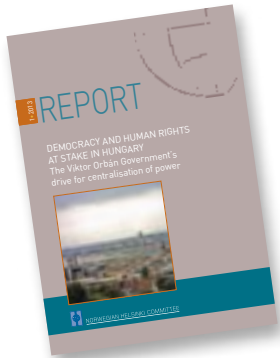
of the right to freedom of religion or belief in Turkey. A roundtable meeting was organized with the participation of members of faith communities and experts in order to receive their input for our draft monitoring report. Our Turkish report was published in October 2013 and the English version in January 2014. The recommendations produced in our report were submitted to public authorities, among others the National Human Rights Institution, the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. This was to draw their attention to the specific issues that have been identified in the monitoring process and seek corrective action. The Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey January-June 2013 has been received as an objective, comprehensive and useful source of information by many stakeholders including international and foreign governmental organizations.

In addition, the project's website (www.inancozgurlugugirisimi.org) continues to be a resource on latest developments concerning freedom of religion or belief in Turkey. We have published statements on legislative changes made by the



NHC's Mine Yildirim at roundtable.





Hungary

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee started to follow the human rights and political situation in Hungary more closely after the election in 2010, in which the Fidesz party managed to obtain a supermajority in Parliament. Viktor Orbán gained a strong mandate to take charge of the Hungarian state as new Prime Minister; a state suffering from increasing debt, a stagnating economy, as well as a range of other challenges. Reforms were clearly needed.

In the course of 2012, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee undertook a number of visits to get a better understanding of the legal and political developments in Hungary. Special attention was also devoted to the situation of the Roma minorities in the country and the growth of far-right extremism. Information was gathered through meetings and interviews with stakeholders in the country, as well as by studying available reports and articles. During meetings in Budapest and Oslo, the NHC met with representatives of the governing party, opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, academics, diplomats and media representatives.

An initial report was published in 2012 and in January 2013 a second and updated report was published. The report “Democracy and human rights at stake in Hungary” describes how Viktor Orbán’s government has been centralising power, undermining the independence of courts and putting media freedom under pressure. The report concluded that during their time in power, Fidesz had effectively managed to weaken institutional checks and balances and compromised the independence of central institutions. The report presented a number of recommendations to the government of Hungary and European institutions as well as to Norwegian authorities.



Bjørn Engesland interviewed in Budapest. Photo: Barakoniy Szabolcs.

The report was met with great public interest in Hungary, both amongst NGOs and state institutions and a general audience. A number of news articles referred to the report, and interviews were done with the Secretary General of the NHC in print and on TV.

The report received, however, considerable criticism from the Hungarian authorities, claiming that it overlooked important factors, exaggerated problems, was biased against the current government, and neglected its concessions to international criticism and Constitutional Court decisions. In particular, Hungary’s ambassador to Norway, Géza Jeszensky, sent a five-page critical letter to the NHC outlining his government’s response, while Ferenc Kumin, Deputy State Secretary for International Communication, responded very negatively to the report in his blog.

In response to this, the NHC outlined its position on some of the main points raised in these discussions in a “Q&A”.

Natalya Estemirova Documentation Centre

Keeping record of crimes and human rights violations in the North Caucasus

The NHC continues its work on the Natalya Estemirova Documentation Centre (NEDC) which has been established to ensure documentation of grave abuses in Russian North Caucasus. The centre is a co-operative project with Russian and international non-governmental organisations.

The North Caucasus, and in particular Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, remains a region where serious human rights abuses continue to take place and where it is highly dangerous for human rights defenders to operate. A culture of impunity prevails, with almost no accountability for the atrocities. What is more, some important documentation relating to the conflicts has already been destroyed or disappeared. And as time goes by the risks of such damage continue to increase, thus further magnifying obstacles to ensuring accountability.

Nine Russian and international human rights organisations, which have extensively documented atrocities perpetrated during the conflicts in the North Caucasus, agreed to compile and preserve documentation from different public and non-public sources in a comprehensive and unified information base. They delegated the NHC to develop such an information base and establish the Documentation Centre in Norway as an independent organisation. The Centre was named after our friend and colleague Natalya Estemirova, an award-winning Russian human rights defender who was abducted and killed in 2009 by unknown perpetrators.

In establishing the Centre, the organisations explicitly refer to international human rights and international humanitarian and international criminal law instruments as the basis for its activities. An underlying principle is that a lasting peace in the North Caucasus is impossible without justice, the establishment of truth and the preservation of a factual history of the armed conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s.

This principle is clearly stated in the 22 September 2010 Oslo Resolution on establishing the NEDC.

Documents and materials include witness testimonies, videos, photographs and other first-hand records, as well as prosecution documents, court decisions and other case materials. The Centre's secure server has been set up and some of the partner organisations have digitised and secured large parts of their archive.

The Centre has developed a cutting-edge documentation system which has a capacity to store and organise transferred archival information in a way that allows its multi-purpose use. Among its numerous functionalities it allows the same document to be used both in order to map concrete criminal incidents and to develop a catalogue of missing or killed persons in the region. It enables the setting of individual incidents and crimes into a larger context of military conflict and attacks. It allows analysts to trace the organisational units allegedly responsible for the large-scale human rights violations committed during the conflict.

Categorisation of information according to the time the information was reported and geographical grids will allow a cross reference of different facts and will relate to the role of different individuals. This work is particularly important in order to analyse the role of possible perpetrators and their respective networks and institutions. The staff of the Centre provide support and quality control of the work.

Next step will be to make use of the NEDC experience to document grave human rights abuse elsewhere.



Human rights in Norway

In 2013, the NHC was active on a range of human rights issues in Norway, including human rights in prisons, Norway's international human rights obligations and reporting to the UN human rights council, re-organisation of a strengthened National Institution for Human Rights, minority and refugee issues, proposals for introduction of a chapter on human rights in the Constitution, promoting human rights policies to political parties, etc.

Election observers in front of the Norwegian Parliament.



Human rights policy

In November the NHC challenged the new government and the opposition parties in a letter highlighting the major human rights challenges at home and abroad and providing key recommendations on human rights policy. The NHC stressed the need to take a positive approach to human rights as a way to secure democracy and the interests of people in Norway. Police arrest, isolation, force in mental health care, the best interests of the child in immigration cases and the policy towards Roma and travellers were listed as top priorities in Norway.



Election observer Ofelya Zalyan from Armenia observing Norwegian election campaigning in Oslo.

Election observation team in Eidsvoll consisting of NHC's Alexandra Sidorenko, Lilia Shibanova from Russia and Pavel Sapelko, Belarus. Photo: Tom Henning Bratlie.



” On behalf of the Armenian Delegation, a.k.a. Ofelya and me, I would like to thank the NHC for the great opportunity to enjoy the beauty of democracy in action. These days in Norway were some of the most memorable days of our lives, and it is rather sad that what should have been normal seemed so unusual and exciting to us.

Election observation – parliamentary elections in Norway, September 2013

Norway held a parliamentary election (Stortingsvalg) in September, and for the third time the NHC invited civil society election observers to observe the election according to internationally applied practices. A total of 34 observers from 11 countries in the former Soviet Union – most of them representing EPDE member NGOs – were thoroughly trained in Oslo and afterwards scattered all over the country to observe the proceedings in 140 polling stations on election day. The observers were from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Democratic elections are not a given. While Norway is a country where most voters have confidence in the election process, election observation plays a crucial role in the documentation of fraud and manipulation in many other countries. Nevertheless, despite the high standard of Norwegian elections, we know from past experience that observers can detect points for improvement also here. Media interest was extensive.

Critical issues identified by our election observers during previous election observation missions organised by the NHC were made subject to debate, and in some cases even been reflected in recent legislative amendments. In 2013, the observers in particular noted unsatisfactory security of ballot papers and were critical of Norwegian legislation allowing active campaigning right outside the doors of the polling station.

The election observation in September was a huge success. As one of our many volunteer translator and observer companions commented: "I just have to say that I think you have managed to achieve an amazing thing with this observer visit. After talking with observers, I got the impression that the experience they now have of Norway means a lot to them. And although this will not lead to any immediate changes in practice in their home countries it will still contribute to increasing people's knowledge about democracy and their rights." We think this comment sums up exactly what we wanted to achieve. And thank you to all volunteers for all your hard and committed work!

Counting votes.



Lilia Shibanova and NHC's Berit Lindeman at press conference day after the Election. Photo: Tom Henning Bratlie.



Election observation in Tromsø. From left: Joakim Brattvoll, Nozima Kamalova, Sergiy Tkachenko.



” I don't want to expand too much on the situation in our countries, we all know what it is like, I am just hoping that at some point in our lifetime we will see Norwegian-like elections in our countries and will be able to speak about our elections with pride and not regrets. Once again we would like to thank everyone for this great opportunity to meet you all and to share this experience with each other.

Thank you, thank you, thank you again! We very much appreciate everything you all did for us!!!”

Vardine Grigoryan, Office Manager, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office, Armenia



Amangeldy Shormanbaev, Sjarhei Chaika and Inna Sangadzhieva.

Alla Lipchanskaia at visit to the Norwegian Parliament.



ELECTION OBSERVATION AND THE NHC

The NHC was early in embracing election observation as a tool for monitoring democracy at times of elections, and has observed countless elections in the whole OSCE region. Nowadays, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is the main multinational actor for observing elections in OSCE participating states, organised by experts from all participating states. The NHC is of the firm belief that domestic civil society must also engage in observing elections: They understand society to

interpret developments between and during elections better; they continue the work of promoting democratic values also between elections and have the potential of being forceful participants in the public debate. The NHC reiterated its emphasis on election observation when we co-founded the European Network for Democratic Elections in December 2012. It comprises many of eastern Europe's most prominent NGOs that organise election observation in their home countries. The fact that several of these organisations

are under immense pressure from the authorities only underscores their success in documenting fraud and manipulation of election processes. The head of Belarusian Viasna, Ales Bialiatski, was convicted to four and a half years in prison in 2011, Golos (Russia) has experienced court trial and Election Monitoring and Democracy Center's director Anar Mammadli (Azerbaijan) is in custody since November 2013, awaiting trial. All are long-term partners of the NHC and monitor elections.



From parliamentary election observation in Norway 2013. From left: Daniil Kislov from Uzbekistan, NHC's Ivar Dale and Elshan Suleymanov from Azerbaijan observing the election in Stavanger.

Prisons

In 2013 the NHC visited Ila prison, the institution in Norway where most inmates serving preventive detention are placed.

Refugee protection issues

Given our knowledge about the human rights situation in the countries in which we are active, as a human rights organisation we have a responsibility to give some assistance to asylum seekers from some of these countries who are in need of protection in Norway. We agree to intervene in a limited number of cases where intervention may be valuable and necessary to receive protection from Norway.

We provide information to asylum lawyers, the immigration services and other authorities, both generally and on specific cases. In 2013 the NHC continued to support asylum lawyers with information related to cases of asylum seekers, in particular from the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Central Asia. A number of decisions in individual cases at the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE), and in first and second instance courts, have been based on, or referred to, information and testimony from the NHC. Although we do not have regular consultations for asylum seekers, we do experience a constant stream of applicants to our office, which shows there is an unmet need for assistance for this group in Norway.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights

The NHC co-operates with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) on a range of issues. The NCHR functions as a secretariat for a government-appointed commission to investigate past policies related to the Romani people (Tater) national minority, and to propose measures for the government to strengthen the protection of the human rights of the group. The commission was reorganised in 2013, with former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs and former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebæk, being appointed as new leader. The NHC Deputy Secretary General Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal was appointed as member of a so-called resource group of the commission, together with representatives of Romani organisations. The NHC took part in discussions with the Commission on priorities concerning issues to be dealt with.

The NHC regularly provides briefings for election observers heading to missions in areas where the NHC has key expertise. Secretary General Bjørn Engesland is a member of the board of the Centre for Human Rights, and the NHC is also a member of the advisory board of the NCHR/National Institution for Human Rights.

Human rights in the Constitution and future National Institution for Human Rights

The NHC remained active on issues related to the future organisation of Norway's National Institution for Human Rights. The NHC continued to argue that a separate Human Rights Commission should be established, taking over the role of being Norway's National Institution from the NCHR, being set up and given sufficient resources to become fully Paris Principles-compatible and able to ensure full respect for human rights in Norway.

The NHC took part in discussions based on a proposal from a parliament-appointed committee to amend the Constitution, including a chapter on all categories of human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural). The NHC supported the proposal, arguing that listing human rights in the Constitution will increase their prominence in legal and political matters.

Human Rights Human Wrongs documentary film festival

Human Rights Human Wrongs, Scandinavia's only film festival dedicated to human rights, was arranged for the fifth time in Oslo in 2013. The event took place at Parkteatret and Litteraturhuset from 5-10 February. As before, the NHC co-organised the festival together with Oslo Dokumentarkino and the Human Rights House Oslo.

The festival was built around four themes: Outcasts, Freedom of Expression, Protest Movements and Payback/Economic Injustice. The aim of the festival is to generate and stimulate debate on known and lesser-known human rights issues, raise awareness on human rights violations, demonstrate the importance of human rights documentary film-making and provide a platform for activism and further engagement.

Again, all these goals were achieved: 21 documentaries from 12 countries were screened. In addition, seven panel debates and Q&As which advanced the themes of the festival and raised questions about how people can continue the action. The festival also hosted 12 international guests, who participated in debates and discussions. These included Alma Masic who is head of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina, an organisation working to build a common civil society across ethnic borders in the post-conflict region of former Yugoslavia. The festival also screened the documentary Who killed Natasha, a documentary that explores the murder of the Russian human rights defender Natalia Estemirova. The movie was introduced by the NHC's Inna Sangadzhieva and Akhmed Gisaev.

Human Rights Human Wrongs managed to attract an audience of about 2,500 people, while over 30,000 people were reached through social media. Media coverage was extensive.

**HUMAN RIGHTS
HUMAN WRONGS**
DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL



Main themes HRHW 2013.



Panel debate with Alma Mašić and Stalin K.

NGO Forum for Human Rights

The NHC is the secretariat of the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights. The forum strengthened the visibility, coherence and impact of Norwegian civil society organisations on Norwegian domestic and international policies. In 2013, the NHC co-ordinated reporting and initiatives taken by the forum.

The forum promoted recommendations on human rights at the United Nations in 2013 and was supported by 13 Norwegian NGOs, highlighting the need for action on human rights in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia amongst 10 priority issues.

In preparation for the UN Human Rights Council examination of Norway in 2014 the Forum sent a report on human rights

in Norway to the UN in September 2013. The main topics in the report are the excessive de facto isolation in police cells and the unexplained variations in the use of force in mental health care. The forum also provided extensive comments on the draft government report to the Council in an attempt to influence the content of the report and the policies of the government. Amongst the concerns was a push for ratification of UN complaint mechanisms.

The NHC helped to strengthen civil society participation at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly by coordinating travel support from the Norwegian MFA for Norwegian NGOs.

NHC's Inna Sangadzhieva, Akhmed Gisaev and John Færseth



Audience at Human Rights Human Wrongs.



Co-operation and international processes

The NHC is a member of several national and international networks of human rights organisations. Each year our representatives participate in a range of international meetings and conferences. We strive to be a key player among organisations and fora dealing with human rights issues, our goal being to influence international organisations and states to protect human rights and promote human rights issues.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM)

The NHC was present at the OSCE/ODIHR's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw and held several interventions covering a wide range of the issues in which the NHC is engaged.



HDIM in Warsaw.

NHC's Ivar Dale and Foreign Minister Børge Brende.



OSCE Ministerial and Civic Solidarity Platform
The NHC and a range of other activists from Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia gathered at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Kiev in connection with the OSCE Ministerial Meeting. During the meeting, the Civic Solidarity Platform developed a policy document containing civil society analysis and recommendations on alarming human dimension issues across the OSCE region and on human dimensions issues in Ukraine, in light of the country's OSCE Chairmanship. It also includes recommendations for increasing the efficiency of the OSCE human dimension process. The NHC's Ivar Dale met with Foreign Minister Børge Brende during the meeting which took place at the beginning of the Euromaidan mass protests.





International Partnership for Human Rights

In 2011 the NHC entered into a formal collaboration with Brussels-based NGO International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) to represent the NHC in EU bodies and to serve as a two-way information channel between the EU and the NHC. The agreement ensures that the NHC can have input to some of the many relevant advocacy opportunities in the EU structures during the year. In 2013, through this co-operation the NHC has been informing the EU institutions of its findings and concerns related to human rights issues in various countries and regions

Human rights dialogue

The NHC has since 1999 participated in the official human rights dialogues held by the Norwegian government with Indonesia and Vietnam.

International justice

The NHC is active on international justice issues, providing comments and viewpoints to the media and taking part in seminars and discussions on issues related to the operation and set-up of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the two UN ad hoc courts for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as other international legal bodies, and universal jurisdiction issues under Norwegian law.

The NHC is a member of both the international NGO coalition for the ICC (CICC) and the Forum for International Criminal and Humanitarian Law (FICHL), and takes an active part in some of the activities.

Bjørn Engesland at conference in The Hague.

Oslo Freedom Forum

The NHC remained a partner in organising the Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF), an international conference first organised in 2009 to gather activists from across the world to speak about fundamental freedoms and democracy issues. The main organiser is the New York-based Human Rights Foundation. The fourth Oslo Freedom Forum took place on 13, 14, and 15 May, with engaging speakers from all over the world. The NHC invited Natalia Khalida of Belarus Free Theatre to present her story at the OFF.



Natalia Kaliada.
Picture: OFF.

International networks

The NHC is a member of several international networks of human rights organisations. The NHC is located in the Oslo Human Rights House, which is a member of the Human Rights House Network. We are also a founding and active member of Civic Solidarity Platform, which includes 35 leading civil society organisations and is an international platform for co-operation on advocacy in the OSCE area. In 2012 the NHC was among the founders of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), uniting 14 leading NGOs with a focus on election observation, and is a member of the EPDE steering committee. In addition, we are members of the International Coalition for the ICC, the Forum for International Criminal and Humanitarian Law (FICHL) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and DARE – Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe.

EEA Grants

Building a stronger civil society in Europe

When the EEA and Norway Grants project was launched nearly 10 years ago, the NHC pointed out the importance of supporting civil society in order to support the new democracies in central Europe. Since then, the NHC has been responsible for informing Norwegian civil society about the EEA Grants and the opportunities this work provides for Norwegian NGOs.

The EEA and Norway Grants are Iceland's, Liechtenstein's and Norway's contribution to reducing social and economic disparities in EU countries in central and southern Europe and to strengthen bilateral relations. For the period 2009-14, €1.79 billion has been earmarked for environmental protection, research and scholarships, civil society, health and children, gender equality, justice and cultural heritage. Ten per cent of the total EEA Grants are dedicated to support civil society.

The role of the NHC is to assist in establishing contact and co-operation between NGOs in the beneficiary countries and Norway, and to give advice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in matters related to Norwegian civil society. In 2013, we launched a new website portal in order to share information

and facilitate the search for project partners. We also co-operate closely with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the programme operators in the beneficiary countries, donor programme partners, the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries as well as the Financial Mechanism Office.

The main areas of support of the NGO programmes include democracy, human rights, good governance, anti-discrimination, reduction of social inequalities and gender equality. Calls for proposals were launched in most countries throughout 2013. NGOs from the beneficiary states are very interested in sharing experiences and developing joint projects with Norwegian counterparts. The NHC facilitated the attendance of potential Norwegian partner organisations during matchmaking events.

One of the main cross-cutting themes of the NGO fund is hate speech, and the NHC is involved in this by being a part of the national campaign committee for the Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement, which is supported by the EEA Grants.



Roma village Fakulteta just outside Sofia.

Matchmaking seminar in Warsaw. NHC's Lillian Solheim and Dagfrid Hjorthol in Sofia.



Launch event in Bucharest.



Norwegian delegation at launch event in Bratislava.



Information

Media Contact

As an independent human rights organisation, we consider it imperative to maintain high visibility and communicate our points of view to the general public, the media and directly to the Norwegian authorities. A significant aspect of the activities of our information department is therefore to communicate the work of the NHC and its views to the media and the general public.

The NHC has set the agenda on several important human rights questions in 2013, and we are continuing to be one of the most visible human rights organisations in Norway, and the visibility is increasing year-on-year. Additionally, NHC representatives are frequently used as commentators and experts, and in debates on radio and TV programmes. The NHC also had a substantial amount of appearances in international media.

Website

The information department communicates the work of the NHC through its own website, Facebook, Twitter and publications. The NHC is also active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and uses these channels of communication actively to promote and communicate its work.

Publications

The NHC published the following reports in 2013:

- *Democracy and human rights at stake in Hungary – The Viktor Orbán Government's drive for centralisation of power*
- *Women: Turkmenistan's second-class citizens – Equal only to injustice and vulnerable to arbitrariness*
- *The right to freedom of religion or belief in Turkey – Monitoring report January-June 2013*
- *Report from election observers observing the Norwegian election 9 September 2013.*
- *Kazakhstan: Cunning democracy*

The NHC was also the publisher of the book *Last to know – Stories of a war*. The book was edited by our partners in the Civic Assistance Committee, and is a part of our common project "Human Rights Education in North Caucasus".

All publications can be downloaded from www.nhc.no, or ordered from the NHC information department.

Membership

As of the end of 2013, the NHC had 268 individual members.

Finances

The total spending in 2013 was 40 million NOK out of which project support for partners constituted 25,2 million NOK . Total income balance was 40,1 million.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committees donors are primarily the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Freedom of Expression Foundation (Fritt Ord), Open Society Institute, National Endowment for Democracy and the European Commission. Gifts, members contribution etc. provided an income of 225 345 NOK.







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From our alternative birthday celebration for President Putin at Egertorget. From left: Bjørn Engesland of NHC, Bård Nylund of LLH, and John Peder Egenæs of Amnesty Norway.

