



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting II (2025)

Vienna Austria, 5 - 6 May 2025

SCHEDULE AND OVERVIEW OF SIDE EVENTS

as submitted by the organizers

The Helsinki Document of 1992 (Chapter IV) called for increasing the openness of OSCE activities and expanding the role of NGOs. In particular, in paragraph (15) of Chapter IV the participating States decided to facilitate during CSCE meetings informal discussion meetings between representatives of participating States and of NGOs, and to provide encouragement to NGOs organizing seminars on CSCE-related issues. In line with this decision, governments, civil society and other participants are encouraged to organize side meetings at the Review Conference on relevant issues of their choice.

The side events below have been exclusively organized and scheduled exclusively at the request of participants of the Human Dimension Meetings. The below descriptions have been provided by the organizers. They may have been lightly edited by ODIHR for language but not for content. Responsibility for the content remains with the organizers. Neither the text below nor the events themselves necessarily reflect the views of the OSCE and the organizers of Human Dimension Meetings.

Monday, 5 May

Voices in the Darkness: Civil Society Resistance and Losses during Russia's War against Ukraine
Convened by: Human Rights Centre ZMINA

13:00-14:00, Bibliotheksaal

Working language: English, Ukrainian

Summary:

This event aims to spotlight the critical role of Ukrainian civil society amid Russia's invasion, with a particular focus on the human cost of the war. As military actions continue, thousands of civilians – including human rights defenders, activists, volunteers, and journalists – have been subjected to abduction, torture, and extrajudicial killings. Ukraine is losing many of its most active and courageous citizens: volunteers evacuating civilians from frontline zones are targeted by gunfire and shelling; journalists reporting on life in the occupied territories are detained and tortured; human rights defenders documenting war crimes are attacked by airstrikes.

This event will honour the memory of those murdered by Russia for their courage and commitment to truth and justice. Moreover, the ongoing resistance of human rights defenders and civil society in the occupied territories, including Crimea, is continuing. Despite facing politically motivated persecution,

show trials, torture, and decades-long prison sentences, human rights defenders and citizen journalists living under occupation remain steadfast in defending fundamental rights and freedoms. Their bravery is a beacon of hope – and it is our collective responsibility to support them, advocate for their release, and strengthen Ukrainian civil society during wartime.

Experts will discuss the following issues:

- The role and resilience of civil society and HRDs under fire
- Stories of active citizens whose lives were taken due to the Russian invasion
- The struggle for freedom by tracking detained civil society representatives
- Recommendations to support Ukrainian civil society and HRDs in the context of the ongoing war and the search for lasting and just peace solutions.

The relatives of the civil society victims of the Russian aggression will also address the audience.

Remarks:

- Mr. Yuriy Vitrenko, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna

Speakers:

- Ms. Tetiana Pechonchyk, Human Rights Centre ZMINA
- Ms. Yuliia Somina, relative of the deceased Ukrainian volunteer Illia Shkliaruk
- Ms. Nelia Hrynyshyn, Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea
- Ms. Oleksandra Barkova, sister of the political prisoner and activist Bohdan Ziza
- Ms. Veronika Lapina, Front Line Defenders

Moderator:

- Ms. Anu Juvonen, Special Representative on Civil Society, Permanent Mission of Finland to the OSCE

The state of freedom of peaceful assembly in the OSCE region

Convened by: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

13:00-14:00, Raatsal

Working language: English

Summary:

Freedom of peaceful assembly constitutes a key part of OSCE's human dimension commitments. It is one of the important human rights issues that ODIHR is addressing through its monitoring and capacity-building activities that aim to assist OSCE participating States in complying with international human rights standards.

At a time when worrying patterns continue to narrow the civic space across the OSCE region, ODIHR 6th Report on Monitoring of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in Selected OSCE Participating States (2022-2024) aims to identify and address challenges and trends relating to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly across the OSCE region.

The side event will inform the audience about the main findings from the report and invite participants to discuss the most recent developments pertaining to this fundamental right in the region. It will elaborate on some of the issues, identified by human rights defenders, including on any restrictions on the right to hold and participate in peaceful assemblies, facilitation of assemblies by national authorities, arrests carried out during public gatherings and any instances of the use of force by law enforcement. The aim of the event is to provide recommendations to the OSCE participating States on how to strengthen the respect for the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in line with states' obligations and ensure accountability for any human rights violations, committed during assemblies.

Speakers:

- Ms. Anete Erdmane, Human Rights Adviser/Monitoring and Response Coordinator at OSCE/ODIHR
- Ms. Katarina Golubović, President of Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM
- Mr. Giorgi Gotsiridze, Head of Legal Team for Constitutional Litigation, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
- Mr Nejat Taştan, Chair of Board of Directors for ESHID (AMER) and Chair of Human Rights Joint Platform (IHOP)
- Ms Işıl Demirakın, Board Member of ESHID (AMER)

Moderator

- Mr. Andrew Gardner, Acting Head of Human Rights Department, ODIHR

Human Rights Defenders — Foreign Agents or Agents for Democracy?

Convened by: International Federation for Human Rights

13:00-14:00, Room 531

Working language: English

Summary:

Around June 2025, a new law on 'Foreign Influence' will likely come into force in Georgia. In Kyrgyzstan, in January of this year, the court dismissed the complaint of human rights defenders against the 'foreign representatives' law, which was adopted in 2024. In February of this year, the parliamentarians in Kazakhstan proposed adopting a 'foreign agents law,' and the register of NGOs as foreign agents has existed in the country since 2023. The Georgian authorities claim that the new law is an exact copy of the 'Foreign Agents Registration Act' (FARA) adopted in the United States in 1938 and still applicable today. The same statement was made by Russian authorities in 2012 when the first Russian foreign agents law was passed. However, as has been determined by numerous courts, quasi-judicial institutions and other authoritative international organs, the Russian version of the 'Foreign Agents' – type legislation, which has spread like wildfire in a global context of backsliding from democracy, violates international human rights law in both its letter and implementation.

What impact has the Russian version of the 'Foreign Agents' law, in its various iterations, had on civil society over the past ten years, and how does it spread its legislative know-how to neighboring countries? Why is the Russian version of the FARA a real threat to civil society in Georgia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and other states that are adopting or considering similar legislation, and how has the situation of human rights NGOs and independent media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia changed since the introduction of the first version of foreign agents legislation? How can civil society organizations and HRDs operate in contexts where such legislation has been adopted?

This timely side-event will leverage the direct experience of civil society organizations (CSOs) from countries where such restrictive legislation has been enacted in order to equip policymakers with targeted recommendations to prevent the further adoption of these laws and to lessen their detrimental impact on CSOs and HRDs.

Speakers:

- Natalia Morozova, HRDC Memorial
- Murat Karypov, Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan
- Nino Tlashadze, Human Rights Center
- András Léderer, Hungarian Helsinki Committee

Moderator:

- Ilya Nuzov, International Federation for Human Rights.

How the absence of human rights defenders affects the judiciary in Azerbaijan?

Convened by: ICLaw-Armenia

16:45-17:45, Bibliotheksaal

Working language: English

Summary:

This event will examine the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders and independent legal professionals in Azerbaijan, where repression, judicial misuse, and systemic discrimination have become tools for silencing dissent and obstructing justice. In recent years, international bodies such as the Council of Europe's CEPEJ and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) have raised serious concerns about the erosion of judicial independence and the instrumentalization of the justice system in Azerbaijan. These findings are reinforced by growing evidence of state-led campaigns targeting lawyers, journalists, and civil society actors who advocate for human rights and the rule of law. Our discussion will highlight the increasing risks faced by those who attempt to provide legal representation in politically sensitive or ethnically charged cases.

Drawing on our direct experience in attempting to hire independent attorneys for the defense of ethnic Armenians detained in Azerbaijan, we will expose the discriminatory obstacles and hate speech that pervade the legal environment—practices that have been condemned by UN mechanisms, the Council of Europe, and international courts as violations of fundamental rights. These concerns are especially urgent in the context of the ongoing trials of ethnic Armenians, which not only breach international humanitarian law but also fail to meet basic guarantees of fair trial. Lawyers willing to defend these individuals face harassment, surveillance, and professional reprisals, effectively criminalizing human rights defense work.

This event will bring together legal experts, international observers, and human rights advocates to assess the shrinking space for independent legal action in Azerbaijan, to share strategies for international solidarity, and to call for stronger protections for those on the frontlines of defending justice and human dignity.

Responding to Georgia's Human Rights Crisis

Convened by: Netherlands Helsinki Committee; Human Rights House Foundation

16:45-17:45, Room 531

Working language: English

Summary:

Georgia is facing a rapidly escalating human rights crisis. Since late 2024, the authorities have intensified a coordinated crackdown on civil society, the media, and peaceful protesters. A new wave of repressive laws and punitive measures has drastically shrunk civic space, demanding urgent international attention.

Recent alarming developments — part of a systematic and deliberate campaign to silence democratic dissent and dismantle independent civil society — include:

- Credible reports of torture, ill-treatment, and other gross human rights abuses against protesters, human rights defenders, journalists, and political activists since 28 November 2024;
- Total impunity for violent attacks, threats, and harassment targeting human rights defenders and journalists throughout 2024 and 2025;
- The rapid adoption of repressive legislation, including the “Foreign Agents Registration Act” (1 April 2025), introducing criminal liability for human rights defenders and their organisations, and new amendments to Georgia’s Law on Grants (17 May 2025), effectively cutting off organisations from international funding;
- The passage of legal amendments further restricting and undermining freedoms of assembly and expression;
- Targeted financial repression, including the freezing of bank accounts of organisations supporting unjustly fined protestors, disrupting critical human rights work;
- Escalation of arbitrary repression, with extended administrative detention (up to 60 days) and dramatic increases in protest-related fines, aimed at punishing dissent and deterring mobilization.

The panel will explore:

- What additional forms of international pressure are needed to stop attacks on human rights and fundamental freedoms?
- How should participating States follow-up on the December 2024 OSCE Vienna Mechanism invocation?
- What actions can States take now to support Georgian human rights defenders and civil society?

Speakers:

- Lela Tsiskarisvili, The Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims – GCRT, Human Rights House Tbilisi
- Tamaz Kirtava, Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association
- Mari Kapanadze, Georgia’s Future Academy
- Dave Elseroad, Human Rights House Foundation

Moderator:

- Dinara Gagoshidze, Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Launch event of ODIHR's e-learning course on Risk Management for Human Rights Defenders

Convened by: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

16:45-17:45, Room 533

Working language: English

Summary:

On the margins of the second SHDM, ODIHR will organize a side event to launch its new e-learning course “Managing Risks: Safety and Security in Human Rights Work”. While conducting their important work to promote and protect human rights, HRDs often face challenging contexts and specific safety and security risks. These can be of a physical, digital, or psychological nature; often interlinked and threatening both the defenders’ work and their well-being. There are many external factors that can hinder the work of HRDs, from shrinking civic space and actors that interfere with their rights to threats, outright abuse and hostility. Operating in a hostile environment can lead to mental health challenges, burnout, distress, and fatigue. Such psychological risks and other challenges put HRDs in danger and often divert precious resources such as time, energy, effort and funds away from their primary mission.

To support HRDs and equip them with essential knowledge and skills to manage different risks, ODIHR developed the e-learning course. The side event will feature a presentation of the new e-course and entail a panel discussion with HRDs and civil society experts in risk management. It will reflect on safety and security risks faced by individuals and organizations engaged in human rights work in the OSCE area, and explore possible solutions through a holistic risk management approach. The side event will also discuss how ODIHR and other international organization and civil society actors can support HRDs in this respect.

Agenda:

- Welcoming remarks and introduction by ODIHR – Johannes Heiler, Senior Human Rights Adviser / Acting Deputy Head of Department Panel discussion
- Importance of the risk management process and its holistic approach to human rights work, and a short introduction of the e-course – Mykola Kostynyan, Risk Management Consultant
- Experiences and insights from civil society on dealing with different risks – Tetiana Pechonchyk, Head of the Human Rights Center ZMINA
- Lessons learned and solutions for more effective risk management in civil society organizations and on individual level – Masha Chichtchenkova, Holistic Security Consultant
- Q&A and open discussion

Tuesday, 6 May

Shrinking Civic Space in the Western Balkans

Convened by: Human Rights House Foundation

9:00-10:00, Bibliotheksaal

Working language: English

Summary:

In the Western Balkans, civil society is facing significant threats from authorities. In Serbia, large-scale protests erupted in November 2024 following the collapse of a railway station canopy in Novi Sad which

killed 16 people. Since then, the authorities have reacted with increasing violence against protesters, a crackdown on civil society organisations, and attacks on journalists. In Bosnia & Herzegovina's Republika Srpska (RS), authorities are taking legislative action to limit civic space and silence independent voices. The authorities recently adopted a "foreign agents" law which targets NGOs receiving foreign funding. The law "runs counter to international standards and the commitments to democracy and human rights", according to ODIHR. The authorities have also adopted additional pieces of legislation which challenge the constitutional order of the country, threaten public participation, and could have a chilling effect on freedom of expression. This side event will look into current trends related to civic space in the Western Balkans and how the OSCE and participating States can support civil society under attack there.

The panel will focus on the following key questions: How are authorities in the Western Balkans using legislative and other means to limit civic space? What are the trend lines for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Western Balkans? What can the OSCE and participating States do to protect human rights defenders and civil society against attacks on human rights and fundamental freedoms?

Speakers:

- Uroš Jovanović, Civic Initiatives (HRH Belgrade)
- Katarina Golubović, YUCOM (HRH Belgrade)
- Edo Kanlić, Transparency International in BiH (HRH Banja Luka)
- Redžib Skomorac, Center for Environment (HRH Banja Luka)
- Moderator: Dave Elseroad, Human Rights House Foundation

Civil society in captivity: Enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions by Russia as a tool to erase civic space in occupied territories of Ukraine

Convened by: Media Initiative for Human Rights

9:00-10:00, Room 533

Working language: English

Summary:

Since 2014, and especially after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the Russian Federation has systematically targeted Ukrainian civilians engaged in civic life. Journalists, human rights defenders, local officials, and OSCE representatives have been arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, or subjected to inhumane treatment for their pro-Ukrainian views or refusal to cooperate with occupation authorities. These are not isolated cases but part of a wider campaign to suppress civic freedoms and erase democratic governance in occupied territories. This side event will show how arbitrary detentions are used to systematically weaken civic space in areas under Russian control and will explore risks to civic actors in the context of peace talks and post-conflict recovery. In the absence of functioning mechanisms for the release of civilian detainees, Ukrainian civil society will share the idea of grouping detainees by category and highlight ways OSCE participating States can support their release.

The discussion will explore the impact of Russia's detention practices on civic space and peaceful assembly through the lens of different affected groups. MIHR will present cases of journalists and media workers detained for reporting on occupation. ULAG will highlight the fate of Ukrainian OSCE staff still held in captivity. Human Rights Centre ZMINA will address the persecution of local government representatives as part of Russia's strategy to undermine governance and impose control. The Crimean Human Rights Group will highlight the topic of the Ukrainian women in Russian captivity with a special focus on volunteers and journalists. A testimony from a detainee's family member will add a personal

perspective. Defending civic space must include protecting those already silenced for standing up to defend it. This event will contribute to SHDM II by raising awareness of Russia's attacks on Ukrainian civil society in occupied territories and stress the need for OSCE action to secure the release and recognition of unjustly detained civilians.

Speakers:

- Lyubov Smachylo, Head of Analytical Department,
- MIHR Ievgeniia Kapalkina, Lawyer, Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group
- Onysiia Syniuk, Legal Analyst, Human Rights Centre ZMINA
- Olga Skrypnyk, Head of Board, Crimean Human Rights Group
- Hanna Korshun-Samchuk, niece of Volodymyr Mykolayenko, the abducted former mayor of Kherson and civilian detainee

Moderator Organizers:

- MIHR
- ULAG
- ZMINA
- Crimean Human Rights Group