



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

Time: **13:00-14:00**
Venue: **Bibliotheksaal**
Title: **Voices in the Darkness: Civil Society Resistance and Losses during Russia's War against Ukraine**
Convenor: **Human Rights Centre ZMINA**
Working language: English

Summary: This event aims to spotlight the critical role of civil society in Ukraine amid the full-scale Russian invasion, with a focus on the human cost of war, especially civilian losses, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and persecution in the temporarily occupied territories. As military actions continue, thousands of civilians, journalists, activists, volunteers, and human rights defenders have faced abduction, torture, and murder. Many remain in Russian detention. Despite this, Ukrainian civil society remains a vital force in documentation, advocacy, and support for victims and their families. Experts will discuss the following issues: - The cost of war in the stories of loss and abduction - The struggle for freedom by tracking detainees - Activism and resilience of civil society under fire - Persecution of women activists in the occupied territories - Which legal and humanitarian responses are needed

Speakers: Human Rights Centre ZMINA Crimea Human Rights Group Civil society victims Frontline Defenders

Time: **13:00-14:00**
Venue: **Raatsal**
Title: **The state of freedom of peaceful assembly in the OSCE region**
Convenor: **OSCE ODIHR**
Working language: English

Description of the event:

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

Time: **13:00-14:00**
Venue: **Room 531**
Title: **Human Rights Defenders — Foreign Agents or Agents for Democracy?**
Convenor: **International Federation for Human Rights**
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 FARA a real threat to civil society in Georgia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and other states that are contemplating the measure, and how has the situation of human rights NGOs and independent media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia changed during the last year since the introduction of the first version of foreign agents legislation? How could civil society organizations and HRDs operate in contexts where the measure has been adopted? The timely side-event will address these questions by drawing on the experience of CSOs from each of the states where the measure has been adopted, in one form or another, with the view towards developing concrete recommendations to policymakers on how to limit its spread and blunt its impact on CSOs and HRDs.

Time: **13:00-14:00**
Venue: **Room 533**
Title: **The persecution of dissenters. Violation of the rights of ruscular citizens in Ukraine**
Convenor: **Information Group on Crimes against the Person**
Working language: English, Russian

Summary: In Ukraine, the rights of national minorities are violated, in particular, there is a persecution of the Russian -speaking population of the country through an inappropriate attitude to language, culture, history and religion. The Ukrainian authorities refuse the right to exist Russian -speaking civil society organizations, persecute public activists who advocate the rights of Russian -language citizens of Ukraine. Within the framework of the round table, journalists, public activists and human rights activists from Ukraine, Russia, EU countries, the USA, India and China will discuss the situation in which the Russian -speaking civil society in Ukraine turned out to be and will offer ways out of it.

Time: **16:45-17:45**
Venue: **Bibliotheksaal**
Title: **How the absence of human rights defenders affects the judiciary in Azerbaijan?**
Convenor: **ICLaw-Armenia**
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.

Time: **16:45-17:45**
Venue: **Room 531**
Title: **Responding to Georgia's Human Rights Crisis**
Convenor: **Netherlands Helsinki Committee**
Working language: English

Summary: In recent months, the Georgian authorities have taken increasingly aggressive steps to silence dissent and dismantle the space for independent civil society. The recent targeting of Human Rights House Tbilisi, including through the freezing of its bank accounts and a baseless investigation into its legitimate support for peaceful protestors, is unfortunately symbolic of a broader campaign against those defending rights and democratic values. These actions form part of a wider crackdown that intensified in 2024 and has continued into 2025. Recent developments that underscore the need for further international scrutiny include: • Credible civil society reporting of torture, ill-treatment and other gross human rights violations against protestors, human rights defenders, journalists and political activists from 28 November 2024 onward. • The passage into law of the “Foreign Agents Registration Act” on 1 April 2025, which introduces criminal liability for human rights defenders and their organisations, specifically those who fail to register under a stigmatising label of a “foreign agent” for receiving any foreign funding for their legitimate and lawful human rights work; • The freezing of bank accounts of Human Rights House Tbilisi and other organisations supporting unjustly fined protestors, disrupting essential human rights work; • The use of arbitrary administrative penalties, including the extension of detention to 60 days and dramatic increases in protest-related fines, to punish dissent and deter mobilisation; • The failure to investigate violent attacks, threats, and harassment against human rights defenders and journalists throughout 2024 and 2025; • The passage of restrictive legal amendments that undermine freedoms of assembly and expression. The panel will focus on the following key questions: What additional sources of pressure are needed to stop attacks on human rights and fundamental freedoms? What steps should participating States take in follow-up to the December 2024 invocation of the OSCE Vienna Mechanism? What actions can States take to support Georgian human rights defenders and independent civil society?

Panelists: Lela Tsiskarishvili, Human Rights House Tbilisi Mari Kapanadze, Georgia's Future Academy Tamaz Kirtava, Georgian Young Lawyer's Association Dave Elseroad, Human Rights House Foundation

Moderator: Dinara Gagoshidze, Netherlands Helsinki Committee Organised by Netherlands Helsinki Committee and Human Rights House Foundation

Time: **16:45-17:45**
Venue: **Room 533**
Title: **Launch event of ODIHR's e-learning course on Risk Management for Human Rights Defenders**
Convenor: **OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**
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

Time: **09:00-10:00**
Venue: **Bibliotheksaal**
Title: **Shrinking Civic Space in the Western Balkans**
Convenor: **Human Rights House Foundation**
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?

Panelists:

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

Time: **09:00-10:00**

Venue: **Room 533**

Title: **Civil society in captivity: Arbitrary detentions by Russia as a tool to erase civic space in occupied territories of Ukraine**

Convenor: **Media Initiative for Human Rights**

Working language: English

Summary: Since 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Russian Federation and its occupation authorities have systematically targeted Ukrainian civilians engaged in civic life—including journalists, human rights defenders, local officials, and OSCE representatives. These individuals have been arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, or subjected to inhumane treatment for their public work, pro-Ukrainian views, or refusal to cooperate with the occupation. These are not isolated incidents but part of a wider campaign to suppress civic freedoms and erase democratic governance in occupied areas of Ukraine. This side event will show how arbitrary detentions are used to systematically weaken civic space in areas under Russian control. It will also address the challenges of protecting civic space in the context of peace negotiations and post-conflict monitoring. Without guarantees for the safety and freedom of key civic actors, any long-term solution to the war in Ukraine risks being built on injustice and silence. In the absence of functioning mechanisms for the release of civilian detainees, Ukrainian civil society will share the idea of grouping detainees by category (e.g. journalists, volunteers, mayors) 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 three affected groups: Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) will present cases of journalists and media workers detained for reporting on occupation. Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group (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 event will include testimony from a family member of a detainee, bringing personal voices to the discussion. 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, ULAG

Onysiia Syniuk, Legal Analyst, ZMINA