

Ref. CommDH 039 (2014)

## **In Crimea serious human rights violations and attacks on minorities and journalists require urgent action**

<http://bit.ly/1zzx5ae>

Strasbourg, 27/10/2014 - "All cases of serious human rights violations that have occurred in Crimea<sup>1</sup> since February 2014, including the recent cases of abductions, must be effectively investigated and those responsible held accountable. Urgent steps must also be taken to ensure minority rights and security, as well as media freedom and journalists' safety" stated today Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, releasing a [report](#) on his mission to Kyiv, Moscow and Simferopol carried out from 7 to 12 September 2014, the first *in situ* assessment by an international institution of the human rights situation in Crimea since March 2014.

The Commissioner's report highlights specific cases of deaths and missing persons, including the death of Reshat Ametov and three missing local civil society activists, Leonid Korzh, Timur Shaimardanov, and Seiran Zinedinov. The Commissioner notes that criminal proceedings have been opened in relation to certain of these cases and stresses that more resolve is needed in investigating all cases of serious violations of human rights, in line with the international criteria of independence, thoroughness and transparency.

The Commissioner remains concerned about groups rendered vulnerable by events unfolding in the region, including Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians and all those who have refused Russian citizenship. He draws particular attention to searches carried out by masked and armed members of security forces in Muslim religious institutions, businesses and private homes belonging to members of the Crimean Tatar Community. He also expresses concerns about alleged attempts to gain control over churches owned by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. "An unambiguous message of 'zero tolerance' of violence and any kind of discriminatory practices should be sent, and special attention paid to the need to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law in any circumstances. Minorities should enjoy secure conditions enabling them to practice their religion in public or private, receive education in their languages and openly manifest their views without fear and intimidation. It is of paramount importance to refrain from any further measures which may worsen their situation. Failure to do so may lead to new cases of displacement from the region".

The Commissioner is of the opinion that the Crimean Self-Defence forces should be disbanded. "Those who have not been implicated in cases of human rights violations may – if they so wish – be integrated into the local police force after undergoing comprehensive professional training". Moreover, he underscores that "no amnesty should ever be granted to those who have committed serious human rights violations. The obligation to protect the right to life and take effective action against ill-treatment, including by ensuring accountability, must be upheld in all circumstances".

Furthermore, the Commissioner condemns the physical attacks and intimidation against

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<sup>1</sup> The mission of the Commissioner for Human Rights was aimed at fostering the effective enjoyment of human rights. It cannot be interpreted as recognising either the authorities that exercise de facto jurisdiction or any altered status of the territory in question.

journalists in recent months and recalls the obligations to uphold media freedom by allowing the press to perform its vital role of public watchdog. It is also important to uphold safe and favourable conditions for the work of human rights defenders and condemn any instances of harassment against them.

Lastly, the Commissioner stresses the urgent need to ensure “free and unconditional access of international humanitarian and human rights organisations to Crimea from all directions and at all times, as well as unimpeded international monitoring”.

► [Read the report](#)

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member states of the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Nils Muižnieks, took up his function on 1 April 2012