IPHR ANNUAL REPORT

2017

IPHR International Partnership for Human Rights

IPHR - International Partnership for Human Rights

Square de l'Aviation 7A 1070 Brussels, Belgium

W IPHRonline.org

E *IPHR@IPHRonline.org*

@IPHR

@IPHRonline

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IPHR: A decade of achieving meaningful change through partnership

By IPHR Director, Brigitte Dufour

Dear reader,

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) is celebrating its tenth anniversary! Having been around from the very beginning, I will never forget the moment when all the co-founders were united around a kitchen table in Bratislava for the official launch of IPHR's activities! Having defined our mission and values, we hoped that our organization would work efficiently to promote civil society in the region which was dear to our hearts, bring added value to the existing NGO community and maximize impact; support local actions and give a voice to the human rights movement in countries and regions where increased solidarity, cooperation and support were desperately needed. I also remember brainstorming sessions with friends, colleagues and family members trying to decide on the perfect name for our new organisation, something that would reflect the central role that partners in the field would play in our work. Thus, motivated by our passion for justice and freedom, we set up IPHR in April 2008!

Ten years later, civil society plays a more important role than ever. States have exploited security concerns to justify far-reaching restrictions on civil society and to crack down on NGOs that work on "sensitive" issues. Throughout 2017 we continued to strengthen alliances with colleagues on the ground who are constantly faced with an array of attempts and tactics to obstruct their work. Human rights defenders continued to face threats, pressure and arrests on charges brought in retaliation for their professional activities. IPHR has done its utmost to consistently mobilize solidarity for

human rights groups and defenders by raising awareness about their plight, either together with the defender or group under attack or through engaging wider networks and other international partners. While writing and advocating about those developments, attacks and violations of human rights, we were also able to provide direct emergency assistance to defenders at risk, victims and their families.

This erosion of civil society space in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has sadly crept further West into Europe, with populist governments in Hungary and Poland introducing extensive and undemocratic restrictions on NGOs. Other countries may follow suit, putting democracy at serious risk in Europe. This worrying political climate continues to challenge human rights organizations working to uphold international standards at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to find models of inspiration in this troubled world.

On the international level, the environment for conducting human rights advocacy in multilateral fora is challenging as states try to restrict access of human rights organizations to key human rights and political bodies such as the UN and the OSCE, limiting the capacity of NGOs to exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in a peaceful and legitimate way. Our current efforts to think "outside the box" require us to be proactive and look beyond traditional tools of engagement. For example, faced with the slowness of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a tool to fight impunity for international crimes, IPHR and partners have started working with domestic investigative authorities in democratic states that have laws permitting extraterritorial application. Another strategy we use is to promote the adoption of "Magnitsky-style" legislation to target the assets and freedoms of movement of some of the worse human rights violators.

I am proud and grateful to everyone who has believed in us from the beginning and throughout the years, to all colleagues in so many countries who have shown interest in working in partnership with us, and to all those who have invested in IPHR, allowing us to grow into a solid and well-respected organization. We would never have achieved this without the trust of human rights defenders and organizations based in the region we cover. As we enter the next phase of our development, we are grateful to our donors whose support and trust has enabled us to maintain and deepen the quality of our activities. And IPHR would not be what it is today without the enthusiasm, energy and commitment of our small team of staff who always keep in mind the fate of victims of human rights violations as the ultimate purpose behind our work.

Finally, I would like to finish on a personal note and thank my father, who sadly passed away as we were finalizing this report, for his tremendous moral support from the first day of IPHR's existence, and for disseminating IPHR business cards in every corner of the planet he visited, just in case someone somewhere would need our help. Merci papa!

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) is an independent, non-governmental organization which was founded in 2008. Based in Brussels, IPHR works closely together with other civil society groups to raise human rights concerns at the international level and promote accountability for human rights violations in repressive environments. Currently IPHR mainly works on countries in the region of the former Soviet Union (FSU), in particular the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), and Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Russia and Belarus).

IPHR's work is based on the recognition that a strong civil society is essential for the development and consolidation of a truly democratic society and for the effective protection of fundamental rights in any country. IPHR's core values are partnership, responsiveness, commitment and integrity.

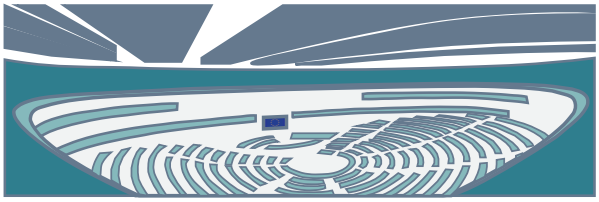
With 2018 marking IPHR's 10th anniversary, our team would like to celebrate the joint work we have carried out with our international and local partners over the past decade, and their incredible courage and dedication when it comes to the important fight for the respect and promotion of human rights in the region. In the years to come, IPHR hopes to continue its efforts to mobilize solidarity on behalf of civil society actors at risk in the FSU and ensure that the concerns of civil society groups in this region are heard at the international level.

This report describes the activities and achievements of IPHR and its partners with respect to dealing with human rights challenges and threats to civil society in the FSU in 2017.

"Natalia Taubina, Director at Public Verdict Foundation and IPHR Board Member: I have the feeling that IPHR always existed – and it's difficult even to remember when exactly our organizations began working together. It must have been from the very start. But the first joint project where we closely worked together for a whole year was in 2013... and since that time IPHR became a natural international partner for us – the first one you think of when you're discussing a project which is not limited to Russia only. I know that for advice on international advocacy I need only to ring Simon or Brigitte ... I see IPHR as a good example of an excellent team of professionals who have a deep understanding of what they are doing, and for whom "equality" is not merely an eight-letter word but a conviction.

"Mariana Rocha, first ever IPHR employee and Programme Officer, WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger (Brazil): It has been an honour for me to contribute to IPHR's development from 2011 to 2014. IPHR plays a critical role in connecting human rights defenders on the ground to decision-makers at the European Union and the United Nations, supporting them to denounce human rights violations more effectively. As the organization celebrates its 10 year anniversary, we should also celebrate how it continues to realize true partnerships throughout the Eurasian region to ensure that violations do not go unnoticed and unaddressed.

2017 at a glance



submissions to intergovernmental organizations

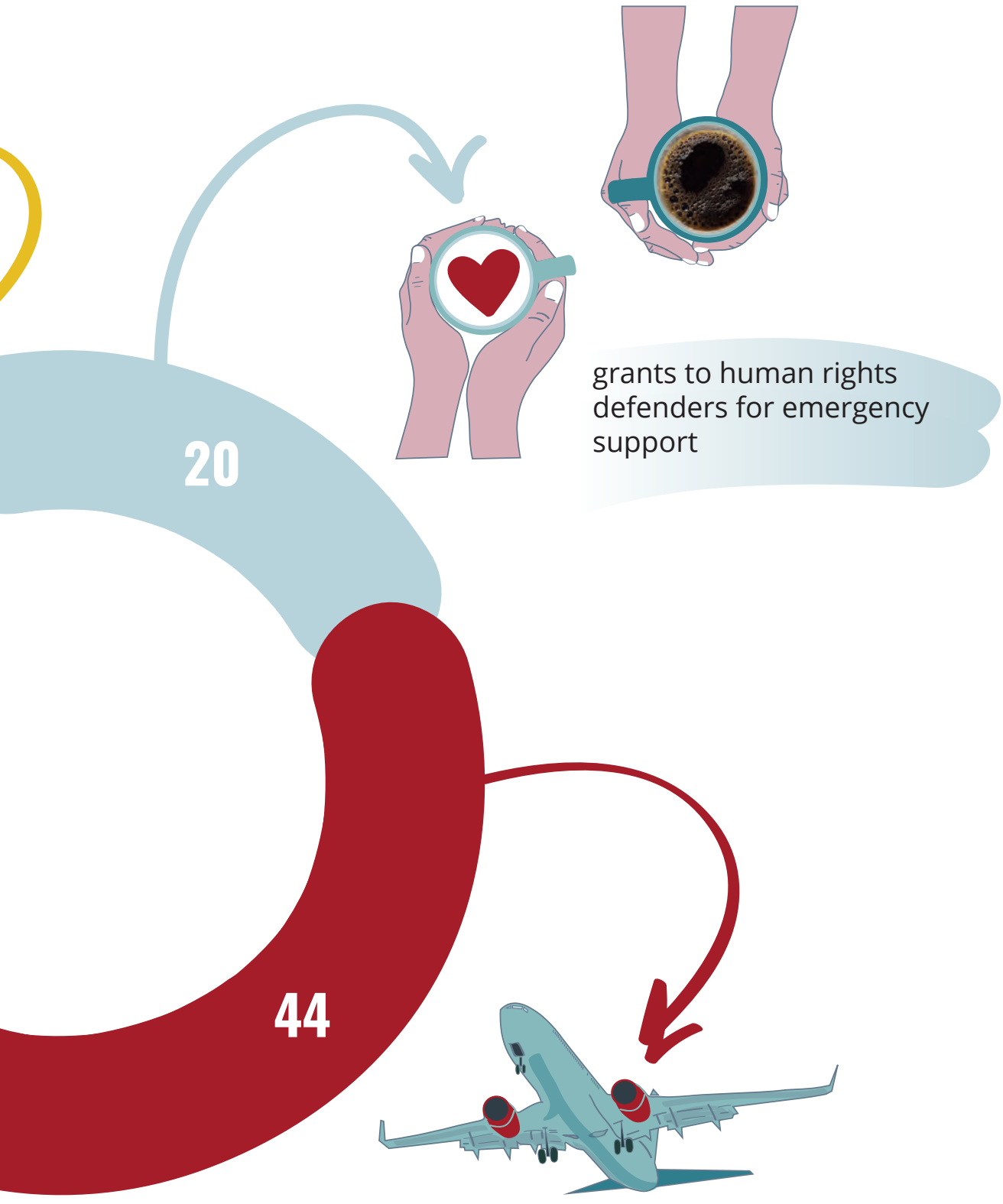
13

3

fact finding missions

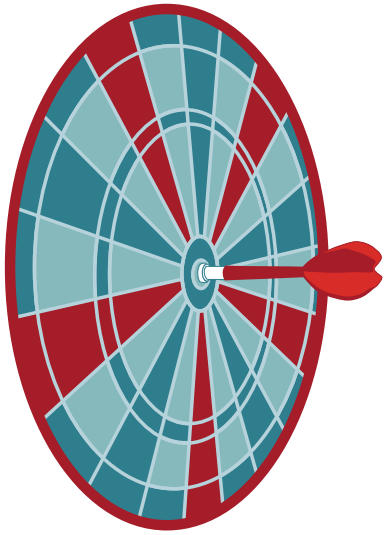
2

trial monitoring missions



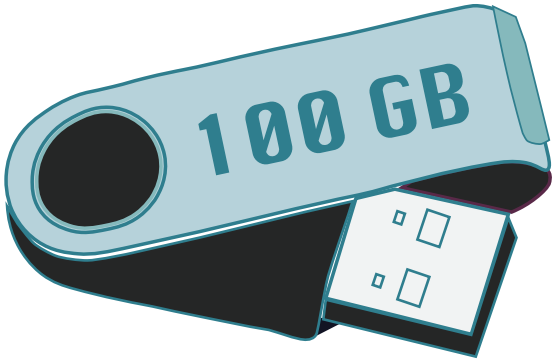
grants to human rights defenders for emergency support

advocacy actions (public events, missions, trips, bilateral meetings)



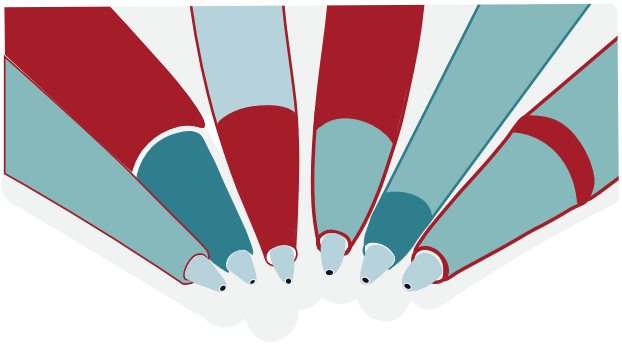
12

projects implemented



100

gigabytes of evidence submitted to ICC



97

testimonies collected

101

human rights defenders trained

South Caucasus

IPHR and its partners continue to raise concerns about ongoing threats and harassment of human rights defenders and journalists, lack of accountability for abuses by law enforcement officials, torture and ill-treatment, and other human rights violations in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).

2017 - Highlighted activities

Fact-finding missions and publications work

In July, IPHR jointly organized a fact-finding mission to Georgia with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Freedom Now (USA) and Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (Georgia). This mission was conducted in connection with the abduction of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli in Tbilisi, and its aim was to investigate the abusive and discriminatory treatment by the Georgian authorities of Azerbaijani exiles living in Georgia. The mission's findings were presented in the *report* ***Repression Beyond Borders: Exiled Azerbaijanis in Georgia***, which was launched in September at a press briefing in Tbilisi. After the release of the report, IPHR and partners held a series of bilateral meetings with Georgian and EU officials, and presented the findings of the report at different events in several other countries.

"Nina Karapetyants, President of the Helsinki Association for Human Rights, Armenia: We congratulate the IPHR team on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of its establishment in 2008... Our cooperation in the promotion of human rights ... dates back to the past, when our NGO was led by Mikael Danielyan, a courageous defender of human rights. Devoted to the principles, which he fostered, we continue our partnership, which we value very highly and acknowledge clearly the important role that you as an international NGO play in enhancing national capacities... The impact of your work spreads far, like the ripples of the ocean are spread around when a stone is dropped into its waters. We feel, we see and we appreciate this support... I would sincerely like to wish IPHR every success in its endeavors and in the implementation of its mission worldwide.

"Tamta Mikeladze, Programme Manager at Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center: Our cooperation with IPHR first started in 2017 and we admit that it turned out to be a significant working experience for us. Through joint effort, we prepared a very important legal and political document showcasing the human rights conditions and state policy towards Azerbaijani dissidents in Georgia. The paper investigates the abduction of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli, which became a test of democracy in Georgia. The IPHR team is distinguished by their professionalism and supportive attitude, which was extremely important in the working process. We hope that our cooperation will continue in the future and we will find new interesting opportunities for joint activities. To that end, we would like to wish success to the IPHR team.

IPHR responded to a request from Armenian civil society organizations to take action about mounting pressure on independent defence lawyers working on high-profile cases in Armenia by organizing a fact-finding mission. That mission took place in September in Yerevan and examined the alleged obstacles faced by defence lawyers in the course of the trials of the Sasna Tsrer group. Prior to the mission, IPHR issued a *joint statement* with the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), a decentralized network of over 80 NGOs from across the OSCE region, which raises concern about the issues described above.

Advocacy towards the international community

Advocacy towards institutions of the European Union (EU) remains high on IPHR's agenda. Throughout the year, IPHR closely engaged with EU and EU member states to draw attention to the human rights situation in the South Caucasus. IPHR issued letters, reports and individual cases, and facilitated and participated in several events in different EU institutions

Drawing on information from NGO partners, IPHR prepared *briefing material* for the EU-Azerbaijan Human Rights Dialogue, which was held in October 2017. This material included a briefing paper drawing attention to alarming trends regarding freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression, as well as an overview of individual cases of human rights defenders and others subjected to politically-motivated persecution. The document was submitted together with the World Organisation Against Torture.

During the year, IPHR also organized two public events at the European Parliament to draw attention to human rights concerns in Azerbaijan. During both of these events IPHR secured sponsorship of key political groups in the European Parliament and the participation of Azerbaijani civil society representatives in the debates.

IPHR, together with partner NGOs, sent a joint *letter* to INTERPOL regarding the case of Leyla and Arif Yunus, calling on it to prevent the misuse of its alert system for the persecution of prominent Azerbaijani human rights defenders.

In September, IPHR co-organised a public event with the Estonian Presidency in 2017 entitled Civil Society in Cyber Space, with a focus on Azerbaijan.

Ahead of the fifth Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November, IPHR took the lead on advocacy efforts to ensure that human rights violations in Azerbaijan were high on the agenda of EU leaders, particularly in their meetings with Azerbaijan's president. A *letter* signed by 37 international NGOs was sent to 28 EU Heads of the State, the President of Azerbaijan, and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, as well as to the heads of the European Council, the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the European Parliament before the Summit. This was followed by bilateral meetings with the EU and member states, and a press-release issued on the eve of the Summit.

Throughout the year, IPHR continued to advocate for the release of political prisoner Ilgar Mammadov. On 22 May, on the three-year anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights's judgment on his case, IPHR launched a campaign and issued a *statement* calling for his immediate and unconditional release, which was signed by 44 organizations. IPHR and 45 human rights NGOs from the OSCE region also wrote to French President Emmanuel Macron, *urging him* to help secure the release of Ilgar Mammadov and other political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

IPHR also submitted a *report on Azerbaijan* ahead of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of this country, a key United Nations (UN) process which is due to take place in May 2018. The report was based on information from Azerbaijani partners and focused on the serious deterioration of the civil society environment in Azerbaijan since the last UPR.

> Necmin Kamil, human rights defender: In the past five years, the civil society of Azerbaijan has been going through the most difficult times. Despite the government's efforts to paralyze the activities of independent groups ... it was not possible for them to eliminate all alternative voices, thanks to the support of international human rights organizations. And throughout this period, IPHR has remained one of the closest and most reliable allies of Azerbaijani civil society and the human rights community, not only by supporting those who are targeted, but also by empowering those who continued to speak out at the local and international level against injustice in the country.

Capacity-building activities

IPHR also works on improving the capacity of local NGOs to enable them to counteract repression and respond to human rights violations in crisis situations by creating rapid response mechanisms across the region. To achieve this, IPHR conducted five trainings, including two for Azerbaijani lawyers on Article 3 and Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights. During the year, IPHR also organized trainings on financial management and reporting for NGOs, using social media as an outreach tool, and crisis management for CSO leaders for human rights defenders from across the region, including the participants from South Caucasus.

IMPACT of our work

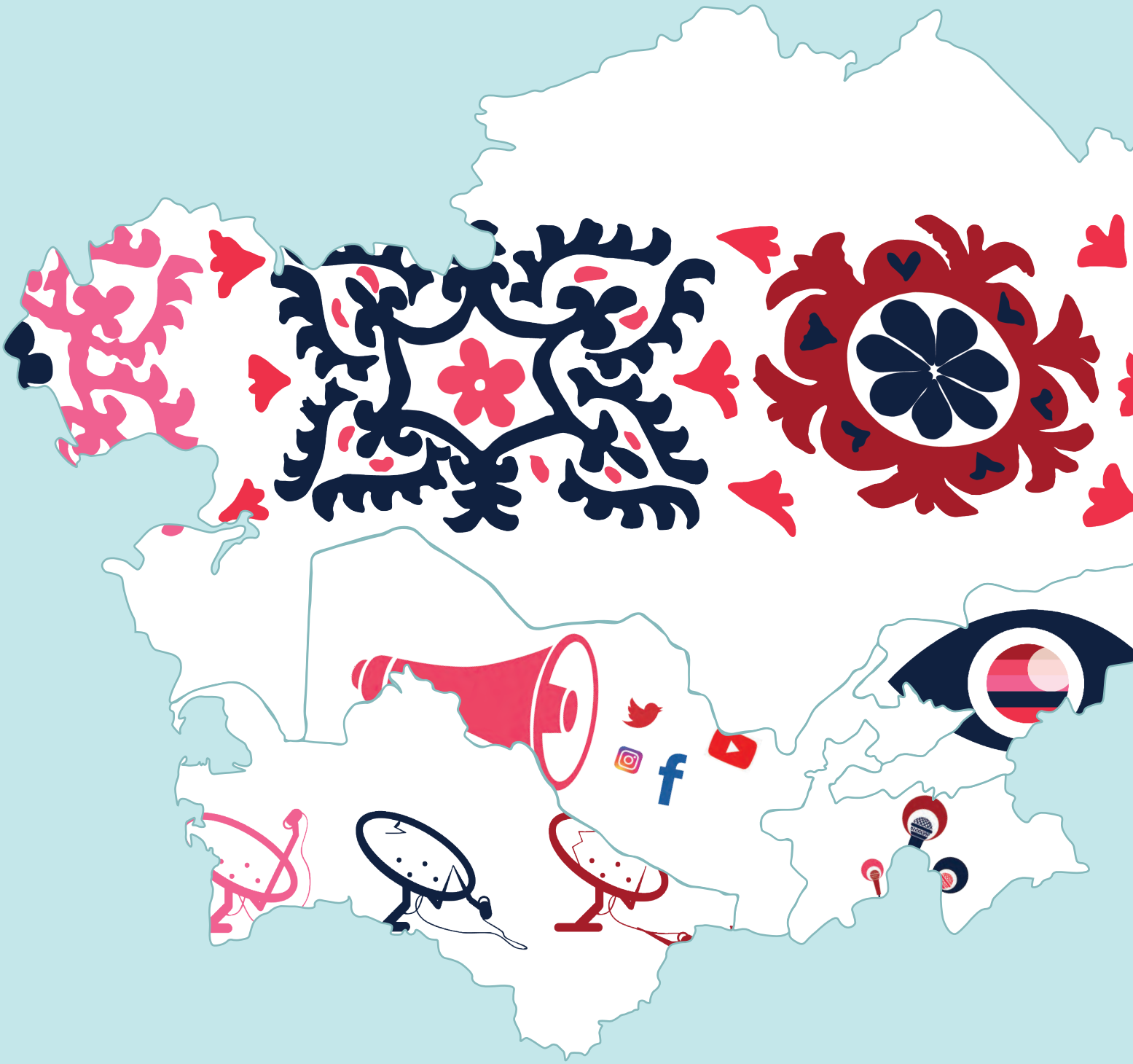
Through advocacy, media work and public campaigns, IPHR and partners drew international attention to human rights violations in the South Caucasus. Examples of the impact of our work include:

IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour was interviewed about the case of Afgan Mukhtarli by the popular Georgian TV channel Rustavi2, and the Georgian Prime Minister responded to a *joint letter* sent by IPHR and 20 other NGOs to him on the case.

In September 2017, following coordinated NGO advocacy on the case of Ilgar Mammadov, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted an interim resolution in which it again called for his immediate and unconditional release and informed Azerbaijan of its intention to bring the case back to the European Court of Human Rights for an infringement procedure in the absence of any tangible progress on ensuring his release. As the Azerbaijani authorities did not release Mammadov, on 5 December 2017 the Committee of Ministers formally triggered the infringement procedure against Azerbaijan under Article 46.6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Activation of the infringement procedure and the prospect of suspension of Azerbaijan's CoE membership sent strong signals not only to the Azerbaijani authorities but also to other CoE member states. Also in October, the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE adopted two strongly worded resolutions urging Azerbaijan to cease its unrelenting crackdown against critics, in which it *again called* for the release of Ilgar Mammadov.

> "Rasul Jafarov, Head of the Human Rights Club: Cooperation with IPHR helps us feel confident that the community of international non-government organizations is keen to support local human rights defenders and grassroots activists. The importance of such collaboration is crucial since space for civil society has shrunk dramatically in Azerbaijan over the last few years. We believe in planning joint activities and future strategies with our partners and IPHR is indeed among them.

More detailed information about the activities carried out by IPHR on South Caucasus can be found *here*.



Central Asia

The space for civil society to operate in Central Asia remained restricted in 2017, and the situation deteriorated further in a number of respects, although some, albeit limited improvements were also seen in Uzbekistan under the new presidency.

Together with partner NGOs from Central Asia, IPHR worked on a number of human rights issues in the five countries of the region, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, the right to freedom from torture, and the rights of vulnerable groups. IPHR and its partners worked on raising pressing human rights issues at the international level through the preparation of regular updates and tailored publications, as well as coordinated and timely advocacy towards the EU, the OSCE, the UN and the wider international community. IPHR also supported networking and capacity-building among Central Asian partners and cooperated with them on ensuring redress for victims of human rights violations and providing emergency assistance to individuals at risk.

IPHR's major Central Asian partners included Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan); the Legal Prosperity Foundation (Kyrgyzstan); Nota Bene, the Independent Center for Human Rights Protection and the Lawyers' Association of Pamir (Tajikistan); Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (Turkmenistan); the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (Uzbekistan); the NGO coalitions against torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; and Central Asian members of the Civic Solidarity Platform. IPHR also cooperated with other human rights NGOs, NGO coalitions and individual human rights defenders from Central Asia, as well as European and international NGOs committed to promoting human rights in this region.

2017 - Highlighted activities

Regular updates

As of the beginning of 2017, IPHR and its Central Asian partners began cooperating with the global civil society alliance CIVICUS on the *CIVICUS Monitor*, a new innovative initiative aimed at tracking civic space worldwide. As part of this cooperation, we prepared regular updates on developments on the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly in the five Central Asian countries, drawing on the on-the-ground monitoring carried out by our partners. In total, more than 25 updates were published during the year. The reports and briefing papers on Central Asia issued in cooperation with CIVICUS Monitor can be found *here*.

> Bobbie Trout, CIVICUS Monitor coordinator: IPHR and its partners in Central Asia are valued and crucial contributors to the online CIVICUS Monitor platform which tracks civic space developments around the world in close to real time. Through IPHR and its partners' comprehensive updates on the five Central Asian countries, Monitor readers have access to a wealth of information from on-the-ground sources – including activists and civic groups. The regular updates provide a greater understanding of the challenges facing civil society as well as threats to civic freedoms. This research collaboration between IPHR, local partners and CIVICUS can be used as an effective tool for advocacy and awareness-raising on individual countries and the region as a whole.

Reports based on fact-finding

IPHR together with Nota bene (Tajikistan) and Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland) published a *joint report* entitled ***He left his footprint on my life – Domestic Violence – Time to Right the Wrongs***. The report was based on information from a fact-finding mission that IPHR carried out to Tajikistan in 2016 in close cooperation with local NGOs and women's rights experts.

> Kurbongul Kosimova, Director at the NGO Nachoti Kazakon: We thank the staff of IPHR for their timely and constant assistance. Our successful and effective cooperation began when, in 2016, IPHR experts conducted a study on domestic violence in Tajikistan... We are grateful for the competence, sensitivity and care they showed in dealing with the victims of domestic violence... Our NGO is situated in rural Tajikistan and for many reasons we often face difficulties in translating and obtaining the necessary information. Often there is a lack of experience in analyzing the results and successfully lobbying the interests of our target group. In all this, tirelessly and in a timely manner, we receive information and assistance from Ms. Rachel . We are inspired by our correspondence with her and it gives us confidence in the value of our work. I felt the same empathy from all of you... when I was invited to Brussels. ... Currently our organization is in a difficult situation, but we do not feel alone. Because our beautiful, sensitive friends are with us. Najoti-Kudakon is always ready to cooperate with you.

IPHR published a *report* entitled ***We just want to be who we are! LGBT people in Tajikistan: beaten, raped and exploited by police.*** It is based on information gathered during the fact-finding mission to Tajikistan mentioned above and produced in close cooperation with local LGBT rights experts.

> Kirom Gulov, Director at Equal Opportunities: It is a great honour and pleasure to work with an organization like IPHR, as we got a lot of experience and expertise working with a professional team that knows what it is doing...I have a lot of experience working with different organizations for the past 25 years, but I have never seen such a responsible attitude, high level of professionalism and communication skills in my field. I would like to wish good speed to all IPHR team, as well as the patience and perseverance that they already have.

Advocacy and tailored publications submitted to international community

During the year, IPHR placed particular emphasis on EU advocacy in its Central Asia work, keeping EU contacts informed about human rights developments in the region and working with partners on highlighting key concerns and recommendations. IPHR and partners prepared and submitted a number of briefing papers to the EU in connection with relevant events, including major issues of concern ahead of the EU's Human Rights Dialogues with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (no dialogue was held with Uzbekistan in 2017), a briefing paper on challenges facing civil society for the EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting in Samarkand, as well as briefing papers for other high-level EU meetings with the Central Asian authorities.

In addition to being in regular contact with EU stakeholders on human rights issues in Central Asia, IPHR took part in EU events devoted to human rights issues in this region and organized advocacy meetings for partners on several occasions. For example, in January 2017, the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament organised a *workshop* on EU-Turkmenistan relations with the participation of academics and policy-makers, at which IPHR was invited to speak. The outcomes of this workshop will feed into an interim report of the European Parliament, which will serve as the basis for establishing human rights benchmarks for Turkmenistan's government with respect to the ratification of the EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The European Parliament has withheld ratification of this agreement due to human rights concerns.

> "Farid Tukhbatullin, Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR): TIHR has been cooperating with IPHR for many years and has done so with pleasure! High professionalism and responsibility characterize the whole team of this human rights organization from Brussels. A friendly atmosphere and willingness to support their colleagues from different countries make joint work with IPHR efficient and productive. We wish our friends further success in their challenging work.

> "Sergey Naumov, Uzbek journalist and human rights defender: In our region human rights activists and independent journalists often receive "special attention" from the authorities for their criticism of the latter. The consequences vary: imprisonment, forced treatment in mental health institutions, long-term discrimination and even being forced to emigrate . In such a political climate it is very important to feel that you are not alone in your beliefs. For me, the solidarity and delicate attention of professional colleagues from IPHR is priceless. IPHR, Happy Anniversary to you and to all of us.

> Favziya Nazarova, Deputy Director at the Public Foundation "NotaBene": IPHR is a core partner for Notabene and the Civil Society Coalition against Torture and Impunity in Tajikistan in conducting advocacy events in Brussels with the participation of key EU officials. In a very short period, IPHR managed to win the trust and support of the civil society organizations in Tajikistan, particularly in the field of protection of human rights defenders. IPHR adopts a very flexible approach, which makes them more attractive to the partners who seek support and protection in situations of risk. Moreover, the core team of the organization is fluent in Russian, which makes this cooperation even more desirable for the NGOs working in post-Soviet countries.

IPHR and partners also prepared submissions to UN human rights reviews of Central Asian countries that took place during the year, as well as communications to UN Special Rapporteurs on individual cases of particular concern. These included, among others:

A *briefing paper* providing information to the Committee against Torture (CAT) ahead of its adoption of a list of issues for the upcoming review of Tajikistan, submitted by Tajikistan's Coalition against Torture, IPHR and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.

A *joint submission* by the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, IPHR and CIVICUS for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Uzbekistan, which will take place in May 2018. This submission assesses Uzbekistan's implementation of its obligations on the rights to freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, and unwarranted restrictions on human rights defenders.

> Nadejda Atayeva, President at Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA): Over the years, IPHR has built an effective partnership with human rights organizations from different countries and the staff of AHRCA is proud to be part of this authoritative alliance. IPHR's professionalism makes it possible for those victims of human rights violations who live in remote areas of closed countries and do not have access to the Internet to be heard. The participation of IPHR in the fate of these individuals was often effective thanks to the expertise of their team who knows how to identify the problem and present it in a legal framework, and therefore oblige governments to react to ensure protection of those in need. Happy anniversary to IPHR team and let's continue our partnership!

A *comprehensive report* by the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) and IPHR for the Human Rights Committee's review of Turkmenistan in March, as well as a *joint submission* by TIHR, IPHR and Human Rights Watch for the UPR of Turkmenistan, which will take place in May 2018. Both reports covered a range of issues of concern and detailed the failure of Turkmenistan's government to implement recommendations received during the previous reviews carried out by the two mechanisms.

IPHR and its partners also drew attention to pressing issues among Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stakeholders, in particular during the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw in September. IPHR and its partners prepared several written and oral statements on human rights issues in the region, including:

- a *statement* about the danger of speaking out in Central Asia, which highlighted alarming trends in the countries of the region with respect to measures taken by the authorities against those who scrutinize and criticize state policies.
- a *statement* highlighting ongoing concerns about torture in Central Asia.
- a *statement* calling for the abolition of travel restrictions on former political prisoners in Uzbekistan.

> Nadira Eshmatova, Director at Legal Prosperity Foundation: **Congratulations on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of IPHR. I have had the pleasure to cooperate with a wonderful team that produces high quality work. I hope you will continue to play an important role in the fight of injustice and impunity for many years. I wish you many more years of continued success!**

In their advocacy and publications work, IPHR and partners prominently raised the cases of individual human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, lawyers and others in Central Asia who were subjected to persecution because of their engagement for human rights, justice and the rule of law. For example, IPHR and partners *repeatedly raised* the cases of imprisoned human rights defender Azimjan Askarov in Kyrgyzstan, the *cases of civil society activists* Max Bokayev and Talgat Ayan activists and other prosecuted for their legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms in Kazakhstan, *activists and journalists* who faced intimidation and harassment in Turkmenistan, and *prisoners* convicted on trumped-up and politically-motivated charges in Uzbekistan.

IPHR and partners also organized an HDIM side-event entitled The danger of speaking out – recent trends in the post-Soviet space, which featured speakers from both Central Asian and other FSU countries. IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour moderated *the event*, which was well-attended and featured active discussion.

> Roza Akylbekova, Deputy Director at Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights (KIBHR): **KIBHR has been closely collaborating with IPHR since 2009. And every time this collaboration has brought tangible results in terms of promotion and protection of human rights in many countries of the world. Thanks to the professionalism of IPHR staff, all of our joints projects are implemented on a very high level. For KIBHR, it is an honor to cooperate with such genuine human rights activists as IPHR team members.**

Networking

IPHR continued efforts to support coordination and networking among civil society groups from Central Asia. In March, IPHR and partners held a seminar in Georgia to discuss challenges facing civil society in Central Asia and strategies for countering them. A *statement* calling for an end to the repression of civil society in the region was adopted at the end of the seminar.

IMPACT of our work

Through our work, IPHR and partners promoted international awareness of human rights issues in Central Asia and provided important input into the review and policy processes of international target institutions, with the aim of ensuring that the Central Asian authorities were held to account for human rights violations. Examples of impact include:

The EU raised issues and cases, about which IPHR and its partners had provided information, in its discussions with the Central Asian authorities such as during the Human Rights Dialogues. EU institutions also took action on urgent individual cases, including, but not limited to, the cases of Max Bokayev and Talgat Ayan (Kazakhstan), Galina Kucherenko (Turkmenistan) and Azimjan Askarov (Kyrgyzstan).

When ratifying the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) between the EU and Kazakhstan in December 2017, the European Parliament adopted a strongly worded accompanying *report* which called for the release of political prisoners and easing restrictive legislation.

UN human rights bodies also echoed the concerns raised by IPHR and partners in their outcome documents. For example, the *Concluding Observations* adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee after its March 2017 review of Turkmenistan reflected concerns raised by TIHR and IPHR on a number of issues, and the *List of Issues* on Tajikistan adopted by the CAT in December addressed concerns detailed in the submission by IPHR and partners for this review.

The advocacy efforts of IPHR, AHRCA and other partners contributed to the releases of a number of political prisoners in Uzbekistan in 2017.

Social media outreach and media coverage of issues raised by IPHR and partners contributed to drawing attention to these issues among a broader audience both in and outside the region. For example, Fergana News, a media outlet reporting about developments in Central Asia, featured an *interview* with IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour in relation to the visit of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein to Uzbekistan in 2017. Additionally, the Diplomatic Courrier, a global affairs media network, published an *article* jointly prepared by CIVICUS and IPHR that highlights the case of Ulugbek Babakulov, a Kyrgyz journalist who was forced to flee the country. The article also discusses broader free speech trends in the country under the new president.

More detailed information about the activities carried out by IPHR on Central Asia can be found *here*.

Eastern Europe and

IPHR continued to document grave human rights abuses and international crimes committed on the territories of Eastern Ukraine that remain outside of Ukrainian control, as well as the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula. It also worked with local civil society organizations to facilitate access to justice for victims of human rights abuses. IPHR carried out advocacy to draw attention to the ongoing crackdown on civil society organizations in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, as well as to argue for maintaining EU sanctions against Russia because of its violations of international human rights and other law.

Russia

2017 - Highlighted activities

Fact-finding and publications work

IPHR responded to the crackdown against peaceful protestors in Belarus in February/March 2017 by deploying an international observation mission to investigate and document the excessive use of force by the Belarusian authorities. The mission delegates closely cooperated with the Belarusian Human Rights Centre Viasna, and the findings of the mission were presented in a *report* entitled ***The Cost of Speaking Out: Overview of Human Rights Abuses Committed by Belarusian Authorities during Peaceful Protests in February-March 2017***, issued jointly with Truth Hounds (Ukraine) and Crimea SOS (Ukraine).

IPHR and Truth Hounds published a *report* entitled ***Attacks on Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure in Eastern Ukraine*** based on information collected by Truth Hounds during 24 fact-finding missions over the year. The document details new evidence of international crimes in the context of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The report was launched in December at a side-event during the 16th session of the Assembly of States Parties of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In the same month, IPHR and Truth Hounds filed an Article 15 Communication to the ICC that covers crimes that have been committed in Donbass region of Ukraine in the period between October 2015 and December 2017.

> “Roman Avramenko, Director at Truth Hounds: The NGO ‘Truth Hounds’ was created by members of the IPHR Ukrainian field mission that has been working with IPHR since 2014. Thanks to this partnership, we have submitted evidence of 208 attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Eastern Ukraine to the International Criminal Court... We also get valuable advice on strategic planning and strong support for our fundraising activities that has enabled us to access new sources of funding. For us IPHR is like an engine - thanks to its advocacy efforts it does not let the governmental institutions sleep on important decisions and forget about human rights violations in Ukraine. It also helps to bring Truth Hounds’ findings to the attention of decision makers.

Advocacy towards the international community

IPHR continues its cooperation with SOVA Center for Information and Analyses (SOVA) and assisted with the preparation of a *summary* of SOVA's report ***Old Problems and New Alliances: Xenophobia and radical nationalism in Russia and efforts to counteract them in 2016***, which was used for advocacy purposes. The document produced within the framework of the jointly implemented EU-funded project summarizes key developments covering issues such as xenophobia and radical nationalism, freedom of conscience, and misuse of anti-extremist legislation in Russia in 2016.

> Alexander Verkhovsky, Director at SOVA Center for Information and Analysis (SOVA): IPHR is a long-standing and always a reliable partner for SOVA. We are grateful for the manifold cooperation and, first of all, for the help in establishing different contacts in Europe. It is hard to remember when this cooperation began, sometime in the days before IPHR as such existed. I truly hope our cooperation will continue for a long time. You are very likable guys..!

IPHR organised a briefing with EU ambassadors at the Political and Security Committee on the Situation of Civil Society and Human Rights in Russia with the participation of Natalia Taubina from the Public Verdict Foundation.

Truth Hounds and IPHR co-hosted a side-event at the OSCE's HDIM in September to present findings on how armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine affects children living close to the "contact line".

Human Rights Watch and IPHR filed a *submission* for the third cycle review of Russia in the framework of the UPR. The submission covers a period of unprecedented deterioration in human rights protections in Russia, which began in May 2012 and intensified in the wake of the 2014 events in Ukraine.

Other work

IPHR co-hosted a Parallel Civil Society Forum before the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting that took place in Minsk in July. With over 100 civil society activists present, the Forum was the first large human rights gathering to be held in Belarus in years. IPHR and partners used the Forum to present the findings and recommendations contained in its March 2017 report on human rights abuses against peaceful protestors in the country. A group of Parliamentary Assembly Members of the OSCE who attended the Forum subsequently raised recommendations from the report at high-level meetings with Belarusian officials.

In June,IPHR and German Russian Exchange co-hosted a seminar on the role of civil society in conflict resolution in Donbass that took place in Warsaw, Poland. Participants discussed the goals and experiences of their engagement in conflict resolution in Donbass in 10 thematic workshops, the findings of which were presented at a HDIM side-event.

IPHR co-sponsored the Russian Aboriginal Summit, a gathering of an independent network of Russian rights defenders who are under constant threat due to their human rights work. The summit organized by HURIDOCS with support from other NGOs took place in Prague in October and provided the possibility to network with aboriginal rights defenders who are often isolated from the mainstream human rights movement and in search of international support and connections.

Together with Public Verdict Foundation, IPHR presented the documentary film ***Life after Torture: The individual vs. the State*** in Brussels in November. The documentary features four stories of people who have faced and overcome torture in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Russia.

IMPACT of our work

An Article 15 Communication, which IPHR and Truth Hounds filed with the ICC in December, included over 100 gigabytes of important evidence on crimes falling within the scope of the Rome Statute. This Communication presented concrete episodes which, IPHR contends, qualify as war crimes and urged the ICC Prosecutor to seek authorization for a full investigation at the earliest opportunity to ensure accountability. The Communication was handed over to Emeric Rogier, the Head of Preliminary Examination Unit of the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC, as well as other members of the unit specially assigned to Ukraine.

The June seminar on the role of civil society in the process of conflict resolution in Donbass mentioned above contributed to reinforcing ties between Russian and Ukrainian civil society actors and their European counterparts and paved the way for a number of new peace building initiatives that are currently being developed. One such initiative is CIVICM+, an NGO platform that was set up in early December 2017 to ensure civil society oversight during the implementation of the Minsk II Agreement.

More detailed information about the activities carried out by IPHR on Eastern Europe can be found *here*.

LEGAL PROSPERITY FOUNDATION
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УКРАЇНСЬКА ГЕЛЬСІНСЬКА СПІЛКА З ПРАВ ЛЮДИНИ
NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE
ОБЩЕСТВЕННЫЙ ВЕРДИКТ
TRUTH HOUNDS
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CIVIC SOLIDARITY

Networking

IPHR remains actively engaged in the coordination work of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), an OSCE-wide network of civil society organizations, and the Brussels-based Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN).

2017 - Highlighted Activities

Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP)

The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) is a decentralized network of over 80 human rights organizations that was created to bring together nongovernment organizations committed to improving the human rights situation in Europe, Eurasia and the United States.

At the OSCE's HDIM in Warsaw, the CSP hosted more than 30 side events to draw the attention of OSCE Participating States to the wide range of issues negatively affecting the implementation of the OSCE's human dimension commitments.

In September during the HDIM, CSP issued a number of statements, including an *appeal* on ***Human Rights and Justice Advocates at serious risk in the OSCE region***. The appeal was coordinated by IPHR and signed by over 40 CSP members.

Together with the Austrian Helsinki Committee and Swisspeace, IPHR organized two important coordination meetings: the Annual Coordination Meeting of the CSP in September in Warsaw and the Parallel Civil Society Conference to the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting that took place in December in Vienna. The latter was attended by over 120 participants, including civil society actors, media representatives and international decision makers.

Following a tradition established in recent years, participants of the CSP Annual Meeting drafted two outcome documents of the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference: *Civil Society Recommendations*, as well as the *Vienna Declaration* on P***reventing Security Measures from Eclipsing Human Rights: Human Rights Are the Core of the Answer rather than an Obstacle to Addressing Terrorism***, which were adopted at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference.

In December, IPHR coordinated a joint CSP statement on ***Safeguarding civil society participation in the Helsinki process – a matter of the OSCE's raison d'être*** about attempts to restrict civil society participation at the OSCE.

“Ivar Dale, Senior Adviser at the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: There are a lot of human rights organizations around, but few who take such good care of their friends as IPHR. When things start getting complicated, IPHR somehow always manages to find the common message among dozens of voices. They promote human rights while also making life easier for human rights defenders. Last time I counted, IPHR was made up of just 11 staff. You would never think so, looking at their output. Serious experience from the countries they cover ensures that every report and every statement from IPHR is a thing to be reckoned with. IPHR are different. They care about human rights defenders at risk in the Caucasus or Central Asia as much as they care for European activists much like themselves. The IPHR is a friendly, inclusive and big-hearted organization, which is exactly what we need to have in the very heart of Europe. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has a long history with Madame Brigitte stretching back for decades, and we are so glad that we'll be making friends with IPHR staff for decades to come. Happy birthday to all of you!

“Geldy Kyarizov and Diana Serebryannik of Rights and Freedoms of Turkmenistan's citizens: IPHR is one of the few organizations that attentively and objectively evaluates the work of human rights organizations and is among the first ones to come into contact with them providing real assistance and support in the human rights work. ... the head of IPHR, Ms. Brigitte Dufour, inspires hope for the people oppressed by the dictatorship regime in Turkmenistan. ... Thanks to people like her, faith in the human rights movement is strengthened... Our organization is proud of its cooperation with IPHR.

Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN)

The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at the EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and peace.

IPHR organized and participated in several activities within the framework of the HRDN's Enabling Environment for CSO space Working Group (WG).

The WG issued the first edition of the Analysis of 89 EU Statements from 2016 on Threats to Civic Space, which covers 42 countries around the world. The work was carried out based on methodology agreed and developed within the HRDN WG and on the *guidelines* DOs and DONTs for EU Public Statements or Letters on Human Rights Defenders. IPHR was responsible for documenting and analysing EU statements on Europe and the Central Asia Region.

To present the analysis and its conclusions, IPHR held several meetings with senior EU officials and led a panel at the EU Delegation's Human Rights Focal Points Training Session in November in Brussels, together with HRDN colleagues.

IPHR also prepared and participated in the 19th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in December and moderated the session on Europe and Central Asia: ***Addressing propaganda and disinformation campaigns against civil society and the human rights agenda***. Participants analyzed how disinformation and propaganda impact liberal values and those actors who promote those values.

IMPACT of our work

The Vienna Declaration and Civil Society Recommendations to the Participants of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Vienna were well-received by OSCE actors. In particular, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, OSCE ODIHR Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttirm, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir, their leading staff and representatives of outgoing German and incoming Italian OSCE Chairmanships attended the closing session of the Parallel Civil Society Conference, accepted the outcome documents of the Parallel Conference – the Civil Society Recommendations and the Vienna Declaration -- made statements, commenting favourably on the usefulness of the outcome documents. Moreover, the Parallel Civil Society Conference provided a necessary forum for important discussion between the civil society and the OSCE actors.

> "The United States Mission to the OSCE: IPHR and its exceptional team are an impressive example of civil society at its best. We at the United States Mission to the OSCE have found that, whether consulting on substantive human rights issues or tapping into its rich and engaged network of experts and activists, IPHR has consistently proven itself a professional, principled, and prized partner. In fact, without IPHR's valuable input, numerous key initiatives we've undertaken at the OSCE to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms would, quite simply, not have been the success stories they were.

IPHR organizational structure

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

IPHR BOARD

Brigitte Dufour
Member

Josée-Anne Simard
Secretary

Natalia Taubina
Treasurer

Jacqueline Hale
Member

reports to IPHR Board

DIRECTOR

Brigitte Dufour

report to Director

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

Simon Papuashvili

programme development, project management and oversight together with IPHR's Director

ADVOCACY MANAGER

Tinatin Tsertsvadze

maintains regular contacts with EU institutions, monitors EU policies towards Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries and coordinates advocacy actions targeting EU and other international institutions

EDITORIAL BOARD

Ann-Sofie Nyman

works on research and publications together with partner groups of the organization as well as on project development, review and reporting and contributes to internal programme planning and implementation

Anne Sunder-Plassmann

works on research and publications together with partner groups of the organization and contributes to IPHR's advocacy and project reporting

Rachel Bugler

works on research and publications together with partner groups of the organization and contributes to IPHR's advocacy and project reporting

ADVISORY BOARD

Manfred Nowak

Yevgeniy Zhovtis

Veronika Szente Goldston

Nigina Bakhrieva

report to Director/ Programme Director

FINANCIAL MANAGER

Christelle Scaillet

provides administrative and financial support to the organization, including with respect to day-to-day operations and staff administration

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Maryna Zastavna

works on social media campaigning and layout of IPHR publications

PROJECT OFFICERS

Julija Ravaityte

assists with project administration and coordination

Svetlana Kniazeva

assists with project administration and coordination

Arzu Geybullayeva

assists with project administration and coordination

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Ksenia Balobolkina

responsible for day-to-day office management and provides administrative, travel and financial support

IPHR
International Partnership for Human Rights