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Events of 2014

The success in May of populist and Eurosceptic parties in European Parliament elections amid continued economic and political fragility underscored the need for a stronger European Union commitment to human rights protection inside its own borders. In March, the European Commission agreed a rule of law mechanism for crisis situations, and in June, the Council of the European Union endorsed the idea of an EU internal human rights strategy. But the EU, particularly the council, remained reluctant to press member states on abusive practices.

EU Migration and Asylum Policy

Strategic guidelines that the European Council adopted in June on migration and asylum, while affirming respect for human rights and the need for a comprehensive EU migration policy, largely emphasized enhanced border control without envisioning new measures to facilitate legal migration or safe access to asylum in the EU.

By mid-November, over 155,000 people had reached EU shores – primarily those of Italy, but also Malta, Greece, Spain, and Cyprus. Italy's Mare Nostrum operation rescued tens of thousands of people from boats in distress, but over 3,000 died at sea since January according to a September International Organization for Migration estimate, including in some cases as a result of deliberate

actions by smugglers. In November, the EU border agency Frontex launched a more limited operation in the Mediterranean as Italy wound down Mare Nostrum.

New Frontex regulations clarifying search and rescue obligations, as well as procedures to ensure speedy disembarkation, entered into force in July.

There were reports throughout the year of summary returns, including of Syrians, by Bulgaria, Greece, and Spain, and of excessive use of force by border guards of those three countries. There were almost 122,030 asylum applicants in EU member states in the first half of 2014, according to Eurostat, up 22 percent from the same period in 2013.

People fleeing Syria enjoyed high protection rates, but also faced returns to the first EU country of entry under the EU's Dublin regulation and under bilateral readmission agreements, without due regard to individual circumstances, including family reunification. Fourteen EU countries offered to resettle 31,817 vulnerable Syrian refugees, with Germany's quota of 25,500 far outstripping all others, although the numbers actually resettled at time of writing was far smaller.

Asylum seekers were held in substandard reception conditions in several countries, including Italy, Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus. Abysmal conditions in Bulgaria improved significantly early in the year as the number of asylum seekers, primarily from Syria, fell, although numbers were again rising at time of writing.

In June, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) said lack of identity papers cannot justify extending immigration detention.

The UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern in October over automatic, lengthy detention of migrants in Malta. Malta continued to detain migrant children whose age is disputed, despite a pledge in March to end immigration detention of children.

In January, the European Committee of Social Rights expressed concern about access to health care for undocumented migrants in several EU countries, including Spain, Belgium, Bulgaria, and France. In March, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) expressed concern about criminalization of irregular immigration, and recommended improving access to justice for undocumented migrants.

A June European Commission proposal to clarify responsibility for processing asylum claims from unaccompanied children was pending examination by the European Parliament and Council at time of writing.

Discrimination and Intolerance

Roma continue to experience discrimination, social exclusion, and deprivation across the EU, with an October EU FRA survey finding that Roma women are disproportionately affected. In December 2013, the Council of the EU made recommendations to guide implementation of national Roma integration strategies. In September, the European Commission announced enforcement action against the Czech Republic over the long-standing failure to desegregate Roma children in school.

In January, Council of Europe (CoE) Human Rights Commissioner Nils Muižnieks warned of growing anti-Semitism in Europe. There was repeated evidence to justify his warning during the year, including a gun attack at a Jewish museum in Brussels that left four dead, and rising reports of anti-Semitic violence and incidents including in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Authorities generally responded strongly. The alleged museum attacker was on trial at time of writing.

The Council of the EU adopted conclusions in December 2013 calling for adequate recording, investigation, and prosecution of hate crimes, as well as assistance, support, and protection for victims.

The CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (known as the Istanbul Convention) came into force in August. At time of writing, eight EU countries had ratified. In March, the FRA published results of the first ever EU-wide survey on violence against women, with one in three women reporting they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.

A FRA report in March noted that fear of deportation deters irregular migrants from reporting crimes to the police, either as a victim or as a witness.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in July approved France's 2010 law banning the full face-veil, despite its negative impact on women's right to personal autonomy and religious freedom. Similar laws exist in Belgium and several towns in Spain.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called on European governments in June to tackle racism in the police, including by prohibiting racial profiling, and providing training on identity checks. A December report by FRA made similar recommendations.

In October, the results of a FRA survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people across the EU found high rates of bullying in schools and harassment and discrimination against transgender people and lesbian women. Respondents said they rarely report such incidents to the authorities.

A May survey by the FRA concluded that persons with disabilities face considerable obstacles to political participation, while in 15 EU countries, people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities under legal guardianship are stripped of their voting rights.

Counterterrorism

In a March resolution on communications surveillance, the EP called on EU member states, particularly the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Poland, to review laws governing their intelligence agencies to ensure they are in line with the ECHR and subject to effective oversight.

In a report on the right to privacy in the digital age published in July, the UN high commissioner for human rights urged states to conduct surveillance only if necessary and proportionate.

The CJEU struck down the EU Data Retention Directive in April, finding that requiring telecom providers to engage in blanket data retention violated privacy rights.

The ECtHR ruled in July that Poland was complicit in the rendition, secret detention, and torture of two terrorism suspects by the CIA in 2002 and 2003 and had made no real progress in investigating the abuses. Despite credible evidence that many other EU countries – including Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK – were involved in the CIA renditions program, only Italy has prosecuted anyone.

Croatia

Despite limited reforms in June, the guardianship system continues to deny roughly 18,000 persons with disabilities the right to make decisions about their lives. Implementation of a 2011 deinstitutionalization plan progressed slowly, with 554 people transitioned to community living, while more than 8,200 remained institutionalized as of September.

Croatia's constitution was amended in December 2013 to ban same-sex marriage following a referendum. In July, Croatia's parliament passed a law allowing civil partnership for same-sex couples.

In June, the ECtHR ruled that Croatia failed to investigate adequately the death of a Serb civilian killed by the Croatian police during the 1991-1995 war. National courts have yet to address more than 200 war crimes cases.

Serbs continued to face discrimination, with those stripped of tenancy rights during the war facing ongoing difficulties benefitting from the 2010 government program that permits the purchase of property at below market rates.

Harassment and discrimination against Roma continue, with stateless Roma facing particular difficulties accessing basic state services such as health care, social assistance, or education.

The asylum and migration system remains inadequate. In the first half of 2014, there were 271 new applications, and 19 people granted protection. Asylum seekers continue to be detained. Unaccompanied children are placed in a residential home for children with behavior problems in Zagreb without adequate guardianship.

France

The government failed to enact in-depth reforms to address abusive police identity checks, including ethnic profiling. A new code of police ethics entered into force in January requiring the use of the polite form of address but with minimal guidance on the use of pat-downs.

Evictions of Roma living in informal settlements continued, with rights groups reporting that 10,355 people had been evicted between January and September 2014, most of whom did not have adequate alternative housing. In September, the CoE human rights commissioner called on France to end such forced evictions. An internal police instruction to police to systematically evict Roma living in the streets of Paris' 6th arrondissement was leaked to the press in April. The government subsequently announced that it had been rectified.

In June, a 16-year-old Roma boy was badly beaten and left unconscious in a shopping cart in a Paris suburb. A criminal investigation into attempted homicide, abduction, and detention by an organized group was ongoing at time of writing, but no arrests had been made.

Hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers were evicted from makeshift camps around Calais area in May and July. In most cases, authorities did not provide adequate alternative accommodation.

Parliament passed a new gender equality law in July with measures to encourage paternity leave, protect victims of domestic violence, and ensure equal pay between men and women. The new law also removes a requirement that women who seek an abortion are "in distress."

In July, the government banned several pro-Palestinian demonstrations and a pro-Israeli demonstration on public order grounds, in breach of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. In July, a kosher restaurant in Paris was attacked. In nearby Sarcelles, a kosher store and a Jewish-owned chemist were burned, amid riots that erupted after a pro-Palestinian demonstration was banned. A dozen people had been convicted or were under investigation for the violence in Sarcelles at time of writing, including a man sentenced to four years' imprisonment in October for burning the kosher store, looting, and attacking police officers. Also in July, police arrested a man for an attempted arson attack against a Jewish cultural center in Toulouse.

In July, the government proposed a new asylum bill to increase accommodation for asylum-seekers, give suspensive effect to all appeals against negative asylum decisions, and speed-up the asylum process. It also proposed a new immigration bill allowing French authorities to ban citizens from other EU countries from traveling inside France for up to three years if they are deemed a threat to a "fundamental interest of society" or "abuse the law" – a move that appears to target Roma. Both bills were before parliament at time of writing.

In November, parliament approved a counterterrorism law prohibiting people from going abroad if it is suspected they would participate in terrorist activities, or would pose a threat to public safety on return; creates a criminal offense of "individual terrorist enterprise;" and allows the authorities to require Internet service providers to block websites that incite or promote terrorism.

In October, a man died during a demonstration against the construction of a dam in the Tarn area. His death appeared to have been caused by a stun grenade fired by gendarmes. An investigation was underway at time of writing.

In its annual report published in April, the National Consultative Human Rights Commission found widespread and increasing prejudice against Roma, and, for the third year in a row, an increase in attacks and threats against Muslims.

A December 2013 law allowing for far-reaching government surveillance of communications in breach of the right to privacy prompted little public debate.

Germany

In February, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) highlighted the practice of ethnic profiling by police in Germany, inadequate state response to crimes with a racist motivation, and discrimination against LGBT people.

Demonstrations against the conflict in Gaza in July were overshadowed by anti-Semitic assaults in several German cities. In August, the federal government tabled a new hate crimes law to include racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance in criminal prosecution, pending in parliament at time of writing.

Asylum seekers and refugees protested conditions in reception centres and restrictions of freedom of movement throughout 2014, including with hunger strikes. Police launched an investigation in September into allegations that private security guards repeatedly abused asylum seekers at a reception center in North Rhine-Westphalia state. At time of writing, there were 34 open criminal investigations involving similar allegations against security guards in 7 out of 20 facilities in the state since January 2013.

The German Institute for Human Rights raised concerns about a draft law on asylum policy adopted in September that designates Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia as safe countries of origin subject to accelerated asylum procedures. At least three federal states continued to return Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians to Kosovo despite concerns about discrimination and inadequate integration measures on return.

The trial continued of an alleged member of a neo-Nazi cell and four alleged accomplices accused of murdering nine immigrants and a policewoman between 2000 and 2007.

Media reports indicated that there was cooperation between German and US agencies in mass surveillance activities. A commission of inquiry formed in March is investigating mass surveillance in Germany.

Greece

In a report released in March, the UN independent expert on foreign debt and human rights warned that the impact of the austerity measures in Greece had been particularly severe on the most vulnerable. Golden Dawn established itself as the third most popular party in the country with 9.4 percent of the vote in May's European Parliament elections.

Attacks on migrants and asylum seekers, and LGBT people continued, with a network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) recording more than 400 incidents over the last three years.

A ministerial decree adopted in June introduced residence permits on humanitarian grounds for undocumented victims and witnesses of hate crimes. In September, an Egyptian migrant seriously injured in an attack in 2012 became the first person to receive such a permit.

In September, an anti-racism law improving state response to hate crimes and lifting barriers to justice for victims of racist attacks entered into force, but measures criminalizing speech falling short of incitement raised free expression concerns.

In April, two men were sentenced to life imprisonment for the January 2013 murder in Athens of a Pakistani worker. The court failed to classify the act as racially motivated.

The trial over the September 2013 murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas by an alleged member of Golden Dawn was expected to start before the end of the year.

At time of writing, criminal charges had been brought against 70 suspects, including all Golden Dawn members of parliament and several high-ranking party officials, for creation and participation in a criminal organization.

In July, two of the four men charged for the 2013 shooting of 28 migrant strawberry pickers were acquitted, including the farm's owner. In October, the Supreme Court decided that the case should not be retried. The victims' lawyers said they would appeal to the ECtHR.

Increased security along the land border with Turkey coincided with increasing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers, including Syrians, seeking access through Aegean Sea islands. In October, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that the situation on the islands was becoming a crisis. Sea crossings were marked by at least 40 deaths. There were continuing allegations that Greek border guards engaged in collective expulsions and pushbacks of migrants and asylum seekers at the borders with Turkey.

The CoE human rights commissioner raised concerns in August over the shelving of an incident in January 2013 in which 12 women and children died off the Greek island of Farmakonisi, in what survivors allege was a pushback operation in poor weather.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in June and FRA in December 2013 criticized abusive stops during police operation Xenios Zeus against irregular migrants. In July, the government launched police operation Theseus against drug users, sex workers, and irregular migrants in the center of Athens.

The ECtHR held Greece responsible for inhuman and degrading treatment in immigration detention in eight separate cases since December 2013. In May, an Athens court ruled that the government's February decision to permit detention of migrants beyond the 18 months permitted by EU law violated national and international law.

In an October report, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) described as "totally unacceptable" the conditions in which irregular migrants are held in police stations for prolonged periods.

Despite improvements in the asylum system and significant increase in Greece's protection rates, asylum seekers under the old system still face a backlog of an estimated 45,000 cases. Access to asylum outside Athens and in detention remained difficult.

In January, a man was sentenced to 10 months in jail, suspended for three years, for running a satirical Facebook profile making fun of a deceased Greek Orthodox monk.

Hungary

Rule of law and human rights further deteriorated in 2014. The ruling party won another term in April with a two-thirds majority in Hungary's single chamber parliament. In a speech to ethnic Hungarians in Romania in late July, Prime Minister Viktor Orban declared his desire to end liberal democracy in Hungary. There was fresh pressure on media and civil society.

The Constitutional Court ruled in May that website operators are responsible for any comments to blog posts or news commentary that violate the media law, hamper free speech, public debate, or Internet freedom.

In a June judgment, the Supreme Court held that ATV, a TV station critical of the government, had violated the media law's restrictions on commentary by describing the Jobbik party as "far-right" in a newscast. The same month, the editor-in-chief of Origo, an independent news website, was dismissed after publishing a story on alleged misuse of public funds by the prime minister's cabinet chief.

Neelie Kroes, then-European Commission vice president, stated in July that an advertising tax adopted in June shows that free and plural media remains under threat in Hungary. The tax primarily affects RTL Klub, one of few remaining independent TV channels.

Civil society came under pressure in June when the state audit office conducted surprise inspections of three NGOs that administer foreign donor money, and the government published a list smearing 13 other recipient NGOs, including leading rights groups, as "left-leaning" and "problematic."

In September, police raided two NGOs that disburse grants, seizing laptops, documents, and servers. In October, the state audit office published a report of its audit of the four grant administering NGOs and 55 others that receive grants, alleging fraud, misappropriation of assets, and other financial irregularities. At time of writing, there were at least two criminal investigations into the alleged financial irregularities.

US President Barack Obama identified Hungary in a September speech about pressure on civil society. In contrast, EU institutions were reluctant to speak out on the issue.

By November 2014, 234 homeless people were charged with misdemeanors under a local decree banning homeless people from residing habitually in public spaces. At time of writing, there were no reports of homeless people being jailed.

Roma continue to face discrimination and harassment. In May, a Roma house in northeast Hungary was attacked with two petrol bombs. No one was hurt, and police were investigating at time of writing. Two Roma families were evicted in a larger eviction campaign by local government in the city of Miskolc that targeted some 923 Roma.

Hungary signed the Istanbul Convention in May but had yet to ratify it at time of writing. In September, the ECtHR upheld its April ruling finding Hungary in violation of freedom of religion and association for stripping religious groups of their status as churches in 2010.

Italy

Between January and November, over 155,000 people reached Italy by sea, many of them rescued in the Mediterranean by the Italian navy. While many traveled onward to other EU countries, over 44,000 people applied for asylum in Italy by October, amid concerns about substandard reception conditions, including in roughly 200 emergency shelters.

The government increased to 13,000 spaces in specialized reception centers. Tensions flared in some communities hosting reception centers, including in Rome in November when authorities removed 45 migrant children from a center after neighborhood residents protested violently. The ECtHR ruled in November that Switzerland could not return an Afghan asylum-seeking family to Italy due to the risk of inadequate reception arrangements, particularly for children.

In October, parliament reduced maximum immigration detention from 18 to 3 months. Throughout the year, detainees in such centers had protested conditions and length of stay.

Undocumented entry and stay was decriminalized in April, though it remains an administrative offense.

In October, the ECtHR ruled against Italy over its practice of summarily returning migrants to Greece without individual screening for protection needs and despite risk of inhuman and degrading treatment upon return.

Episodes of xenophobic violence occurred throughout the year. In March, police intervened but made no arrests during attacks over two days on an informal Roma settlement in Naples, leading to its evacuation. Eight men went on trial in September for the racially motivated firebomb attack on a Roma camp in Turin in December 2011. A 17 year old who beat a homeless Pakistani man to death in Rome in September was charged with the killing but police discounted racist motivation.

The European Commission initiated enforcement action against Italy during 2014 over its discriminatory segregation of Roma in substandard, official camps. Roma living in informal settlements were subject to serial evictions.

In July, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention urged measures to end over-incarceration and disproportionate use of pretrial detention against foreigners and Roma. Prison overcrowding remained a problem despite measures, including reforms adopted in June, to reduce sentences and increase recourse to alternatives to detention.

The fatal shooting by a Carabinieri of 17-year-old Davide Bifulco in Naples in September reignited concerns about excessive use of force. In October, an appeals court acquitted six doctors, three nurses, and three prison officers over the 2009 death of Stefano Cucchi. Prosecutors alleged medical staff failed to treat injuries he suffered while beaten in custody. A lower court had convicted five of the doctors of manslaughter in 2013 and acquitted the others.

The Netherlands

Following criticism from political parties and rights groups, the Dutch government in April abandoned plans to criminalize irregular stay.

Dozens of rejected asylum-seekers continued to live in degrading conditions in squats in Amsterdam. Many were from countries to which they could not be safely returned, such as Somalia and Eritrea. The government did not provide them with any support.

In July, the European Committee of Social Rights found that the European Social Charter required the Dutch government to provide shelter, clothes, and food to irregular migrants at risk of destitution. At time of writing, the government had yet to implement the decision.

In April, the UN Committee against Enforced Disappearances urged the Dutch government to ensure that the appeals procedure for rejected asylum applications include substantive review, including of any risk of enforced disappearance upon return.

A law allowing transgender people from the age of 16 to change their gender on their identity papers without having to undergo sex reassignment surgery entered into force in July. Applicants must provide a statement from a medical expert affirming their permanent conviction to belong to another gender.

In a report published in October, the CoE human rights commissioner criticized the extensive use of detention for migrants and asylum seekers.

In November, the Council of State, the highest administrative court, ruled that Somalis cannot be deported to Somalia on the ground that such removals could not be carried out within a reasonable amount of time.

In July, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent expressed concerns about racial profiling by Dutch police. The experts welcomed the debate on the traditional "Black Piet" (Zwarte Piet) figure of the Sinterklaas festival and called for a respectful tone by media during the discussions.

In August and September, the government proposed revoking the Dutch citizenship of dual nationals enlisted in a terrorist group but not convicted of a criminal offense and of those convicted of various terrorism-related offences. Neither proposal had been adopted at time of writing.

Poland

The six-year investigation into secret CIA detention in Poland continued amid criticism and lack of transparency. In September, the Krakow Prosecutor's Office requested a four-month extension. In October, the government lodged an appeal against the ECtHR ruling on the issue. In March, Polish prosecutors refused to recognize a Saudi national detained at Guantanamo Bay as a victim in the pending investigation.

In a June report, the CPT warned about a significant number of allegations of ill-treatment in police custody, and called upon the government to strengthen safeguards against such abuse.

In March, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern over the small number of hate crime cases referred to the courts, despite rising incidents.

A January change to the criminal code permitted prison governors to apply for detention orders for long-term prisoners deemed to pose a threat to the life, health, or sexual freedom of others. There are concerns among civil society that the law creates a form of preventive detention and will allow for the long-term detention of people after they complete their sentences.

There was pressure in May to narrow Poland's already restrictive abortion law when over 3,000 people, mostly medical professionals, signed a "declaration of faith" against abortion and other reproductive services.

A so-called conscience clause in Poland permits medical professionals to refuse to carry out an abortion if it conflicts with their faith. In June, then-Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that medical personnel must put legal obligations to the patient above personal beliefs.

Following its October review of Poland, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended the establishment of less restrictive conditions and clear standards for legal abortion and effective remedies to contest refusals of abortion.

Spain

The government responded to increased attempts by migrants and asylum seekers to enter Spanish enclaves in Morocco, Ceuta, and Melilla (in the latter, up 234 percent compared to 2013), with enhanced border control. Fifteen people died in February as they attempted to reach Ceuta by sea; the Spanish Guardia Civil fired rubber bullets and tear gas in their direction. The judicial investigation into the deaths was ongoing.

In September, a judge in Melilla charged the head of the local Guardia Civil over summary returns to Morocco. NGOs documented pushbacks and excessive use of force. Several investigations and trials were ongoing in Spain against a handful of officials for violence against detainees in immigration detention facilities.

The European Commission, the Council of Europe, and the UN expressed concern about proposed legal changes to formalize summary returns from the enclaves to Morocco. The government announced in November it would create border posts where asylum seekers could register.

Widespread opposition forced the government to abandon, in September, a bill that would have restricted access to safe and legal abortion. The government indicated it would pursue changes to require parental consent for 16 and 17 year olds.

Government bills to modify the criminal code and create a new public security law, under examination in parliament at time of writing, raised concerns about interference with fair trial rights and the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. In October, the ECtHR ruled twice against Spain for failing to investigate effectively allegations of ill-treatment during incommunicado detention and endorsed the CPT's recommendations to Spain to allow access to a lawyer from the outset of detention and medical examination by a doctor of choice.

In September, data showed mortgage evictions remain a serious problem, exposing vulnerable persons to insecure housing and significant debt, and the government announced an extension of the moratorium on evictions without broadening narrow criteria. The CJEU ruled in July, for the second time in two years, that Spain's inadequate safeguards against unfair mortgage terms violate EU law.

In separate July reports, the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and UN special rapporteur on truth and justice criticized March reforms limiting the ability of courts to prosecute suspects of grave international crimes committed outside Spain. Both made recommendations to

ensure accountability for Franco era crimes, including by making enforced disappearance a domestic crime. In October, a military court indicted five servicemen for the 2004 torture of two Iraqi prisoners in Iraq.

Spain ratified the Istanbul Convention in April, and at time of writing continued a review of existing national law on domestic violence. By the end of August, 28 women had been killed by their intimate partner since the start of the year.

According to the Spanish General Council of the Judiciary, the number of people with disabilities stripped of their legal capacity increased 172 percent between 2005 and 2013.

United Kingdom

The government failed to honor its promise of a new independent judge-led inquiry into the UK's involvement in renditions and complicity in overseas torture. In December 2013, the government announced the inquiry would be conducted by the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), a parliamentary body that lacks full independence from government and has repeatedly failed to exercise effective oversight of the security services.

The law enabling same sex marriage in England and Wales came into effect in March. In Scotland, the law was passed in March and is expected to go into force in December.

A government-sponsored bill to combat modern slavery, before parliament at time of writing, included inadequate safeguards against employer abuse of migrant domestic workers. In April, a parliamentary committee urged the government to restore the ability of migrant domestic workers in the UK to change employer, having found that a visa tying them to one employer "institutionalizes their abuse."

During a visit in April, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Rashida Manjoo was barred from entering Yarl's Wood immigration removal center, where migrant and asylum-seekers, most of them women, are detained. In her initial report, Manjoo noted the impact of legal aid cuts on access to justice for women victims of violence.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor announced in May a preliminary examination into allegations of systematic abuse of detainees by UK armed forces in Iraq between 2003 and 2008.

In July, the High Court ruled that the accelerated "detained fast track" procedure denies asylum applicants the legal representation needed to prepare their case effectively. Rights group charge the system puts people at risk of being removed to countries where they risk persecution, torture, or other ill-treatment.

In July, parliament passed emergency legislation renewing the government's powers to collect data on the communications of millions of people, contradicting the April ruling by the CJEU on blanket data retention. The law also extended UK surveillance powers extraterritorially. In November, the government disclosed the existence of policies allowing UK intelligence agencies to intercept confidential lawyer-client communications on national security grounds.

A law passed in July allows the government to revoke the citizenship of naturalized UK citizens if they engage in terrorism or other actions "seriously prejudicial to the vital interests" of the UK, even if it renders them stateless. In November, the government published draft legislation to ban people suspected of involvement in terrorism abroad from returning to the UK for two years and allow police to confiscate the passports of those suspected of travelling overseas to join armed groups.

An NGO, recorded an increase in anti-Semitic incidents from January to June compared to the same period in 2013, including violent assaults, damage, and desecration of property and threats. In London, the Metropolitan police recorded a 92.8 percent increase in anti-Semitic crime in the 12 months leading to October 2014.

According to official statistics, there were 88 suicides in prison between April 2013 and March 2014, a 69 percent rise compared to the previous 12 month period and the highest figure in a decade.

Foreign Policy

The EU remained among the largest humanitarian donors to the Syrian crisis. In March, EU foreign ministers finally expressed clear EU support for referring the situation in Syria to the ICC. However, the EU high representative missed the opportunity to engage the entire EU framework with a strategy on how best to advance strong global support for a UN Security Council referral.

In March, Xi Jinping paid his first visit to Brussels as China's president. During this visit, EU leaders, including European Parliament President Martin Schulz, ducked their obligation to publicly raise concerns about the shrinking space for rights advocates in China.

In May, EU foreign ministers adopted EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression online and offline, adding to the EU's Human Rights Guidelines. The guidelines, which include specific commitments and objectives, were designed to enable the EU to better promote and protect freedom of expression worldwide.

The EU's 28 member states rallied behind a Swiss-led joint statement on the human rights situation in Bahrain delivered at the UN Human Rights Council in June. The statement called on Bahraini authorities to release all individuals "imprisoned solely for exercising human rights" in the country. In response to EU support for the statement, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) cancelled the EUGCC Ministerial meeting that had been scheduled to take place in late June.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, EU foreign ministers adopted conclusions reiterating their strong support to human rights defenders. However, throughout 2014, the EU's response to the crackdown on human rights defenders and activists worldwide was inconsistent. Strong responses, such as EU condemnation of the life sentence handed to Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti in China, tended to be the exception rather than the norm.

Numerous weak statements were issued in response to the arrest of leading rights defenders in countries such as Azerbaijan and Burundi. While the EU supported the above-mentioned Joint Statement on Bahrain, the EU high representative and EU member states failed to pursue any

meaningful strategy, as called for by the European Parliament, to secure the release of imprisoned Bahraini activists, two of whom hold EU citizenship.

The EU continued to be one of the most outspoken international actors criticizing Israel for its illegal settlement activities. The EU's guidelines excluding West Bank Jewish settlements from EU-funded projects came into effect on January 1. Under the guidelines, the EU will only give "grants, prizes and other financial instruments [loans]" to Israeli entities that do not operate in the occupied Palestinian territories and promise not to spend the money there.

Despite the EU being a staunch supporter of the ICC and of accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, some EU member states continued to press Palestine not to seek access to the ICC. On July 22, EU foreign ministers seemingly warned Palestinians against the ICC, asking the Palestinian leadership "to use constructively its UN status and not to undertake steps which would lead further away from a negotiated solution." The same statement recognized that Israel's continued settlement expansion, settler violence, evictions, forced transfer of Palestinians, and demolitions (including of EU-funded projects) risked the irreversible "loss of the two state solution." Near total impunity for serious international crimes in the Palestine-Israel conflict continued to fuel abuses by all sides.

The EU imposed restrictive measures against Russia in response to its occupation of Crimea in March, support for abusive separatists and interference in Eastern Ukraine. The sanctions target individuals and Russia's state finances, energy, and arms sectors. In September, the European Parliament gave its consent to an EU-Ukraine Association agreement.

The EU continued to play a leadership role on certain country resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly, including on Belarus, North Korea, and Burma, securing continuation of important UN reporting mechanisms for all three countries. But the EU failed to play a leading role in bringing new human rights crisis, such as the recent crackdown in Egypt or the situation in Uzbekistan, to the agenda of multilateral forums.

The European Parliament awarded the 2014 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Dr. Denis Mukwege from the Democratic Republic of Congo for his fight for survivors of sexual violence.

In August, Italy's Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini was appointed as the next EU high representative for security and foreign policy at an EU leaders meeting in Brussels. Mogherini, who is also vice president of the European Commission, took up office in November.

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