Europe and Central Asia Overview

Human Rights Developments

The civilian carnage in Chechnya and the further entrenchment of authoritarian governments in Central Asia dominated human rights concerns in 2000. The democratic defeat of Slobodan Milosevic, who had laid waste to democracy in Serbia and instigated the deadly Balkan wars, held out hope of a new hope for peace and rule of law in the Balkans. But the international community’s selectivity in using leverage hindered efforts for positive change in human rights in the region, especially in the crises in Chechnya and Central Asia. While the victory of Vojislav Kostunica over Milosevic was strongly supported by the lifting of international sanctions, governments were reluctant to take a strong position on the need to bring Milosevic, an indicted war criminal, before the International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), as well as the broader issue of cooperation with ICTY.

The international community lacked the political will to exercise leverage with Russia to press for a halt to the massive abuses perpetrated by Russian forces in Chechnya. This stood in stunning contrast to international engagement in other crises in the world, notably East Timor, but was regrettably consistent with the international community’s response to the 1994-1996 war in Chechnya. The pattern of impunity for abuse that so easily prevailed in that war persisted in the current war, as Russia clearly sensed it had nothing to lose by prosecuting the war without thought to civilian costs or to the consequences of wanton brutality.

Russian forces’ violations of humanitarian law in the current war, which began in late 1999, caused some thousands of civilian casualties, the result of indiscriminate bombing. The capital of Chechnya, Grozny, was razed to the ground. At least 125 civilians were summarily executed in three massacres. Thousands of Chechens were detained arbitrarily on suspicion of rebel collaboration, and once in Russian custody guards and riot police tortured many of them systematically.

The international community often lamented that it had no significant influence over Russia, but squandered real opportunities for leverage or sanctions in favor of political expediency. During one of the war’s bleakest moments the World Bank refused to withhold credit payments to the Russian general budget. The U.S. government and other member states refused even to entertain the notion of conditionality. A U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution might have had a positive impact, but the member states who so commendably sponsored it stood idle as Russia ignored the resolution’s requirements. Chief among them was that Russia establish a national commission of inquiry that would lead to prosecutions for abuse. In a more principled move, the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly voted to suspend Russia’s delegation.

The blatant impunity for war crimes in Chechnya cried out for accountability, but there was none. This failure quickly became obvious, but governments were unwilling to take up a more robust commitment to international justice as they had in other parts of the world. No member state of the Commission on Human Rights had the courage to insist, for example, on an international commission of inquiry, which would have necessarily invoked higher standards of rigor and impartiality than the wan Russian effort. Council of Europe member states declined to lodge an interstate complaint at the European Court of Human Rights. Unlike the
Kosovo conflict, where the international community responded quickly to the needs of ethnic Albanian refugees, security concerns and a lack of international interest meant that many of the needs of displaced Chechens went unmet. Food, safe water, medical care, gas, wood supplies, and electricity were provided haphazardly and often ran out. Most children had their education disrupted, and during the early days of the war, disease and exposure claimed the lives of some displaced persons.

As corruption and grinding poverty worsened in Central Asia, fighting terrorism and “religious extremism” was an overwhelming concern both to national governments otherwise intent on maintaining their grip on power, and to the international community. This came at the expense of human rights and a long-term vision for the rule of law in the region. Uzbekistan’s unrelenting crackdown against political and religious dissenters continued unabated, and authoritarianism deepened in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan.

For the second time in two years, violence erupted in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In August pitched battles erupted between armed insurgents and government troops in southeastern Uzbekistan and neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Thousands were displaced from their homes by the clashes. The group responsible, the so-called Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, demanded that the Uzbek government release what the group claimed were an estimated 100,000 wrongfully jailed Muslim prisoners and allow for the observance of Islamic law precepts, including permission for Muslim women to wear the veil.

Some observers viewed the August violence as the self-fulfilling prophesy of the government’s multi-year campaign against “religious extremism,” the product of fierce and violent repression of thousands of Uzbek citizens. This year the government’s campaign to stop the spread of “religious extremism” expanded and caused pervasive fear. Hundreds more independent Muslims who chose to study Islam or worship outside government-controlled religious institutions joined thousands imprisoned in previous years. Many were sentenced to long prison terms, for alleged membership in illegal religious organizations, or distributing religious leaflets not approved by the state. They were often arrested on trumped-up charges of illegal possession of narcotics, weapons, or religious literature, held incommunicado and denied legal counsel, and convicted in grossly unfair trials at which judges routinely ignored credible evidence of torture.

Symbolic of the Uzbek government’s confidence that concern about terrorism trumped its human rights obligations was its decision in October not to appear to defend its initial report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee on the day it convened. The government’s explanation was that officials needed to prepare for a conference on terrorism.

Governments in other parts of Central Asia continued the drift toward worsening authoritarianism by manipulating elections, harassing the media, and jailing political rivals on trumped-up charges. The government of Kyrgyzstan employed these with a vengeance this year, which sobered those who still considered that country to be Central Asia’s “island of democracy.” The Kyrgyz government jailed prominent opposition candidates before the October presidential elections, persistently harassed the opposition media, and drove some nongovernment organization activists into exile. The government of Kazakhstan, firmly entrenched after last year’s deeply flawed elections, continued to harass opposition media and political figures. The Tajik government flagrantly manipulated the February ballot to guarantee the election of a parliament dominated by the ruling party. In November 1999, Turkmenistan, one of the most repressive countries in the world, held utterly hollow parliamentary elections, followed by an indefinite extension of the president’s term in office.
Once again, the international community chose not to use available policy tools to effect change or take a principled stand. This was particularly true of the United States government, which was concerned about losing its influence in Central Asia to Russia by putting too much emphasis on human rights. Yet the U.S. and its European allies were in unique positions to deliver the economic assistance that Central Asian countries badly want, whereas Russian influence served to weaken these countries’ independence. The U.S. government declined to interpret the crackdown in Uzbekistan as one targeting people for their religious convictions, and for this reason did not name Uzbekistan as a country of particular concern in the area of religious freedom under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. By contrast, Serbia was considered a country of particular concern. The U.S. Department of State certified Uzbekistan as eligible for U.S. security assistance, available under U.S. law only to countries committed to upholding international human rights standards.

The European Union (E.U.), for its part, resisted using its lucrative trade agreements with Central Asian countries to press for human rights improvements. And the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the chief regional organization with a mandate to strengthen human rights, emphasized economic and security cooperation instead, an approach that failed to yield any progress on human rights. OSCE missions in Central Asia did not engage in regular, frank, public reporting on the human rights situation in the region; this was a glaring failure, particularly when juxtaposed against the massive and laudable public documentation and reporting effort undertaken in Kosovo.

Authoritarianism deepened in other parts of the former Soviet Union as well. Under President Alexander Lukashenka, the Belarus government continued to jail opposition figures, drive the opposition media to bankruptcy, and intimidate human rights organizations with abandon. Its October parliamentary election process was deeply biased to favor pro-government parties, which prevailed on election day thanks to falsified election results. In Azerbaijan as well, prior to the November parliamentary elections, the government attempted to exclude major opposition parties and many individual candidates from participating.

In December 1999, Russian President Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned. Vladimir Putin was elected president in March, riding a tide of domestic popularity with carefully-controlled information about the war in Chechnya and promises to get tough on crime and corruption. Putin was a career KGB agent who became head of the Federal Security Service, the KGB’s successor. Despite numerous public assurances of support for democratic values, Putin’s conduct of the war in Chechnya and his impulse to stifle critical media coverage fuelled fears of growing authoritarianism in Russia.

Political developments in Serbia and Croatia toward the rule of law were contrasted sharply, and positively, with those in the former Soviet Union. Perhaps the most dramatic event of the year was the deposing of Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic and the election of Vojislav Kostunica as president. Milosevic had attempted to remain in power by staging early presidential elections on September 24. The stakes were high, as Milosevic no doubt wanted to avoid facing trial by the ICTY. For the first time facing a united opposition, the government had engaged in an unparalleled effort to ensure victory by intimidating, at times violently, opposition members and movements, and brazenly rigging the electoral process. Despite these obstacles, the opposition prevailed in the vote. When Milosevic tried to force a run-off, citizens took the streets, seizing the parliament and television station and ultimately forced Milosevic to acknowledge his defeat.
Milosevic’s departure from power meant new hope for the rule of law and human rights protections in Serbia. At year’s end, top concerns were Serbia’s cooperation with the ICTY, including the transferal of Milosevic and other indicted war criminals hiding in Serbia to The Hague, the release of hundreds of Kosovo Albanian political prisoners, restoring the independence of the judiciary, and bringing to justice police and security forces responsible for serious abuses under Milosevic.

Following the death of Croatian president Franjo Tudjman, the opposition came to power in the presidency and parliament in early 2000. Important progress in human rights quickly followed. The new government began a policy of full cooperation with the ICTY by transferring an indictee to the Hague and allowing the ICTY access to investigate the sites of alleged 1991 war crimes against Serbs. There were positive changes in governance and minority rights as well. The government made a dramatic commitment to the right of Serb refugees to return to Croatia and backed this up with a financial commitment, legislative reform that promised equal treatment for all returnees, and the creation of a new government structure to facilitate returns.

The international community had insisted on cooperation with The Hague as a condition for loans and other important benefits to Croatia. After the fall of Milosevic, however, the international community wavered in its commitment to press for cooperation with the ICTY. While legitimately acknowledging the difficulties for the new authorities if Kostunica attempted to arrest and transfer Slobodan Milosevic to the ICTY, the international community also appeared to postpone indefinitely the whole issue of cooperation with ICTY from its agenda with Serbia, rather than insisting on deliverable interim measures such as the start of negotiations between the ICTY and the new authorities on access for ICTY investigators, discussions on the opening of an ICTY office in Belgrade, and the transfer of official documents necessary for the ICTY’s investigations. The international community’s apparent willingness to compromise cooperation with ICTY as a condition of upgraded relations with Belgrade made it appear as though Serbia was receiving special treatment as compared to Croatia and Bosnia.

Between October 1999 and October 2000, eight indicted war criminals were arrested by NATO forces in Bosnia and transferred to The Hague. Another indicted war criminal killed himself in the course of an October 2000 NATO arrest operation. Croatia also transferred one indictee to the tribunal in 2000. Nonetheless, at this writing, wartime Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic remained at large. Although most North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member government officials continued to insist that they would eventually see their day in court, some continued to resist their arrest. No longer able to argue that Karadzic and Mladic were so prominent in Bosnia that their arrest would ignite popular protest and retaliation against the international community, opponents of the arrests shifted to arguing that these figures had become so sidelined in Bosnia that their detention was no longer necessary to the peace process.

International agencies bore responsibility for guaranteeing human rights in several of the region’s major postconflict zones they oversaw in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Tajikistan. In Kosovo and Tajikistan, these agencies displayed a disturbing tendency to rush the holding of elections in order to satisfy a pre-determined political schedule, even where the conditions for elections to be free, fair, and meaningful were absent, overlooking the harmful way in which serious, ongoing human rights problems undermine the prospects for long-term peace and democracy.
In Kosovo, a de facto protectorate of the international community after the 1999 war between NATO and Serbia, steady violence imperiled the lives of non-Albanians, who were for the most part confined to mono-ethnic enclaves and were unable to travel without KFOR peacekeepers as escorts. Kidappings, drive-by shootings, fire-bombing of homes, and grenade explosions were combined with threats and harassment by Albanians to force ethnic minorities to leave the province. NATO-led KFOR forces and United Nations Civil Police, which together had full responsibility for policing and security respectively, were either unable or unwilling to confront the armed elements of the former Kosovo Liberation Army and others implicated in the violence. U.N. police often lacked the resources and cooperation adequately to investigate and arrest those responsible. While the United Nations’ peace implementation mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) oversaw the administration of justice, the courts were staffed primarily by local judges whose rulings raised serious questions about the impartiality of justice.

The 1996 Bosnian example demonstrated that rushed elections in a postconflict situation could serve to legitimize further some parties and leaders which had been responsible for gross abuses, but the international community chose to overlook this important lesson. Kosovo’s first postwar elections, scheduled for October 28, were by all measures premature, driven more by the desire to meet a predetermined deadline set by the Rambouillet agreement than the need to create the minimum conditions and set the framework for long-term democracy. All but a handful of Serbs and many other minorities boycotted registration, rendering them ineligible to vote. Political violence resulted in the deaths of at least nine people affiliated with the Democratic League of Kosovo or parties linked to the former KLA, and there were politically motivated attacks on journalists.

Whereas in Kosovo the international community accepted premature elections in order to speed along the province’s political development, in Tajikistan the United Nations (U.N.) presided over parliamentary elections in utterly inhospitable conditions as part of its strategy to hasten the end of its own peacekeeping operation. The result for human rights was disastrous. A 1997 U.N.-brokered peace agreement ending that country’s civil war envisioned the elections, held in February 2000, as the last step in the implementation of the agreement. But opposition parties were excluded from the vote, there was widespread fraud, the media was clearly biased, and the overall rights situation was extremely poor. The vote served to legitimate the current president rather than to serve U.N. goals of democratization.

In Bosnia, members of minority groups returned in significant numbers for the first time since the end of the war. In the first six months of 2000, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered nearly 20,000 minority returns in Bosnia, nearly three times the number recorded for the same period in 1999, thanks in part to focused international effort. With the success, however, has come a drop in funds from donor nations, even though a sustained, longer-term level of funding is necessary for the return of Bosnia’s remaining refugees. Croatia’s new commitment to returns was effective in encouraging the return of ethnic Serbs: more than 10,000 returned during 2000, the highest number since the mass exodus of more than 200,000 in 1995.

In Serbia and Montenegro, about 230,000 persons were displaced from the Kosovo conflict and the postconflict persecution of minorities, and 500,000 were refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. This burden continued to strain the resources of Serbia and Montenegro.

Minority rights violations accompanied returns in Croatia and Bosnia, and were a problem elsewhere in
the region. Bosniak returnees to Republica Srpska were the victims of violent attacks in March and July. Serb returnees to Croatia continued to face discrimination at the hands of local authorities, despite a raft of new antidiscrimination measures adopted by the new government in Zagreb, and Serb and Croat communities remained deeply mistrustful of one another.

Roma continued to suffer shocking levels of harassment, violent attacks, and malicious discrimination in Croatia, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, and Slovakia, marring much of the region’s record of progress on other human rights issues. Law enforcement authorities in all of these countries typically did not investigate violent attacks on Roma. Roma children often lacked access to education in Croatia, and in the Czech republic they were disproportionately channeled into classes for the mentally disabled. Municipalities in Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, and Greece forced Roma to abandon their homes, usually citing spurious zoning laws. Roma were evicted from their homes in Athens to clear land for facilities for the 2004 Olympics. In July, a municipal bulldozer, accompanied by the mayor and police, demolished numerous Roma huts in the Athens Aspropyrgos suburb. Greek and Albanian Roma families in the settlement situated on a garbage dump were ordered to leave within three days. In Bulgaria, villagers refused to allow Roma in public places and threatened them with expulsion after an unresolved murder. Roma homes in Macedonia were burned down in suspicious circumstances in the village of Stip. Roma homes in the village were the target of earlier arson attacks in 1992. And in a Serbian town, Roma were banned from a public pool.

Torture of detainees reached crisis proportions in government arrest campaigns in Uzbekistan and Russia (Chechnya). These crises were not aberrations, however, since torture had been part and parcel of the criminal justice systems of both countries for years. Torture of detainees held in Russian custody in Chechnya followed the same methods and patterns as torture perpetrated against common suspects in Moscow or Irkutsk. Similarly, torture to coerce testimony from people arrested in the crackdown against independent Islam in Uzbekistan was systematic.

Torture remained common in Turkey and was used to coerce testimony and confessions in both common criminal cases and security-related cases. In a positive development that suggested heightened government acknowledgment of the problem, the Turkish parliament’s Human Rights Commission published nine detailed reports documenting the persistence of torture. The commission was able to find and photograph torture implements and a “torture room” described to it by victims. This was chilling testimony to the credibility of torture victims, whom governments often dismiss as unreliable or biased.

Several factors accounted for the persistence of torture, among them impunity and poor due process protections, especially in countries of the former Soviet Union. Some countries began to make progress toward reforming due process to prevent torture, but backtracking also occurred. Azerbaijan, where torture was widespread, adopted legislation that for the first time required detainees to be brought before a judge within forty-eight hours. Last year Georgia repealed important due process reforms, and took no steps this year to restore them.

The governments of nearly all Central Asia states took steps to restrict or control the Internet. In a positive move, Croatia decriminalized most aspects of libel, but criminal libel statutes were enforced in Greece and Romania. The governments of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan made liberal use of prohibitive libel suits to bankrupt critical media. In September a Turkish court acquitted Nadire Mater who had been charged
with “insulting the armed forces” for writing *Mehmet’s Book: Soldiers Who Have Fought in the Southeast Tell Their Stories*. Unfortunately, this was not part of a broader pattern of improvements in freedom of expression. Turkish media and politicians furiously debated many issues and openly criticized the government, but those who contradicted the official line on the role of ethnicity, religion, or the military in politics continued to risk prosecution and imprisonment.

Governments made little progress this year protecting women from violence in armed conflict, domestic violence, trafficking, and discrimination. Credible information surfaced about rape of the Chechen women by Russian forces, both in detention centers and during community sweep operations. Even in postwar periods, women’s human rights were not protected. Kosovar women confronted discrimination, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, and abductions following the war. Particularly in the former Soviet Union, those who trafficked women for work in the sex industry continued to operate with impunity, while governments offered thoroughly inadequate protection to women willing to come forward as witnesses to this crime. Police made no visible progress in promoting among their ranks a better response to domestic violence. In Uzbekistan, local governments compounded the problem by pressuring women to stay in abusive marriages in order to keep the divorce rate low.

**Defending Human Rights**

The treatment of human rights defenders varied widely in the region. In some places they were able to initiate groundbreaking work, review national legislation, and seek remedies for abuse in domestic courts and at the European Court of Human Rights. In others, governments went to great lengths to curtail their activities and undermine their credibility.

On October 16, Antonio Russo, a journalist who had documented humanitarian law violations in Chechnya, was killed near his home in Georgia.

Some human rights defenders in the region have had to operate in exceedingly hostile circumstances. The record was extremely poor in Uzbekistan, where the government had a history of jailing human rights activists and denying registration to human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This year the government failed to release two activists and continued to harass those who brought their cases to human rights defenders. It frequently denied defenders access to public trials.

In Serbia, activists, braving constant and baseless accusations of being NATO spies, defended ethnic Albanian political prisoners’ right to due process. One Serbian defender, Bojan Aleksov, was tortured by police.

In Kyrgyzstan the environment for defenders dramatically deteriorated, even as local defenders gained broader exposure to the international community. The government accused some activists of “destabilizing the social order” and threatened one of the country’s most active defenders with arrest, driving him into exile. Turkmenistan refused to allow human rights monitoring of any sort.

Governments employed a range of tactics to impede the work of human rights organizations. The government in Serbia subjected several human rights organizations to groundless tax inspections. The Azerbaijani government banned prominent NGOs from monitoring elections. The Belarus government evicted a legal defense group from its office and was believed to be behind the unresolved series of break-ins and raids of other groups’ offices. In Kazakhstan an unexplained fire damaged the office of one of the
country’s most prominent groups. In Georgia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs simply shut down an NGO program that would have provided round-the-clock pro bono legal services to detainees.

Defenders faced difficulties in conflict and postconflict zones. The Russian government carefully controlled access to Chechnya, making human rights reporting directly from the conflict zone extremely difficult. Human Rights Watch was repeatedly denied access to Chechnya, and Memorial, a leading Russian group, faced many problems with its work there. A coalition of Russian NGOs urged Council of Europe member states to file an interstate complaint against Russia with the European Court of Human Rights. In Kosovo, the compounding effects of years of repression, armed conflict, and the resulting inter-ethnic animosity made local human rights reporting extremely difficult.

In Europe, defenders actively took up discrimination and violence against Roma, often among the most marginalized groups in the region. Defenders in Romania and the Czech Republic lodged cases of discrimination against Roma with the European Court of Human Rights. In Greece, human rights defenders were able in one case to halt temporarily the eviction of Roma. Hungarian Roma families from Zamoly fled to France, applied for asylum, and lodged a complaint against Hungary for failing to protect them from discrimination and violence with the European Court of Human Rights.

**The Role of the International Community**

**United Nations**

Throughout the year, various U.N. actors voiced concern about violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Chechnya, but lacking political support from key member states’ U.N. representatives failed to follow through in any meaningful way on these statements.

In early 2000, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson took the lead on Chechnya. The Russian government responded to her repeated condemnations by refusing her February request to visit Chechnya. When she was finally permitted to visit the region in late March, she acknowledged evidence of summary executions, torture, and rape committed by Russian forces, but she refused to heed calls for an international commission of inquiry, opting instead to leave the accountability effort to the Russian authorities.

The European Union-sponsored resolution adopted in April at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights followed Robinson’s approach. The resolution, the first ever adopted by the commission concerning the conduct of a permanent member of the Security Council, called upon the Russian government to establish a national commission of inquiry to investigate alleged abuses in Chechnya and to permit visits to the region by a number of U.N. human rights monitoring bodies.

Other than periodic calls for implementation of this resolution, no U.N. member state or representative showed an active interest in ensuring Russian compliance with these demands, despite the high commissioner’s efforts. As of this writing, the Russian government had taken no meaningful steps to investigate or prosecute cases relating to abuses in Chechnya, and it had utterly refused to establish a commission of inquiry or invite most U.N. human rights representatives who requested to visit the region. Although the conflict occasionally spilled over Russia’s border with Georgia and resulted in substantial cross-border refugee flows, the Security Council failed even to discuss the issue.
The U.N. continued to struggle with its peace implementation mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), as international attention shifted to flashpoints in other parts of the world. UNMIK made some progress in convincing ethnic Albanian and Serb leaders to participate in transitional power-sharing structures, but peace efforts were marred by political and ethnic violence. Progress was also made in establishing a local police force, but international civilian lacked personnel to police in the interim, despite repeated requests to U.N. member states. Efforts to build an independent judiciary were undermined by UNMIK’s reluctance adequately to supervise the courts, although it belatedly began to appoint international judges and prosecutors to local courts to counter concerns about bias, intimidation, and bribery among local judges and court officials. UNMIK established a special U.N. police unit for the protection of Serbs and began appointing international judges and prosecutors to local judicial systems to counter evident bias and to promote the rule of law.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia continued its important contribution to peace in the Balkans by trying alleged war criminals, including the first-ever war crimes trial based solely on allegations of rape and sexual violence. Its efforts were undermined, however, by the continued failure of the international community to apprehend the indicted masterminds of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, wartime Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic. Moreover, the failure of the international community to insist that deposed Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic stand trial before the tribunal reinforced the perception that the worst offenders enjoy the most lenient treatment.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

After the Istanbul summit of its fifty-four heads of state in November 1999, with grand pronouncements about the organization’s role in upholding human rights, the OSCE’s contribution to human rights protection in the region depended on its willingness to withstand pressure and interference from member states. The result, for the most part, was singularly disappointing. The dogged efforts of the high commissioner on national minorities, the representative on freedom of the media, and the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to condemn abuses, provide training, and convene seminars, were completely overshadowed by the failure of the OSCE to uphold its mandate to deploy a mission to Chechnya and by the organization’s role in organizing and monitoring deeply flawed elections throughout the region.

The members of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya sat in a Moscow office, prevented by the Russian government from redeploying to Chechnya or neighboring provinces where their monitoring and reporting could have provided protection for thousands of civilian victims of the conflict. The OSCE and its member states were unable to convince the Russian government to allow the group to operate in and around Chechnya, even though its right to do so had been clearly stipulated in its 1995 mandate and reaffirmed at the Istanbul summit by all member states, including Russia, and again by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov during April meetings with OSCE Chair-In-Office Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

The OSCE’s continued engagement in Central Asia, this year emphasizing economic and security cooperation, yielded no progress on human rights. For the third straight year, the government of Turkmenistan would not sign a Memorandum of Understanding with ODIHR regarding democratization
activities in the country, which seriously called into question the utility of continued OSCE engagement there.

Perhaps because the OSCE did not have to contend with pressure from member states regarding its work on Kosovo, it engaged in active public human rights reporting there, which included thoughtful criticism of international institutions. This served as a positive model for what could be accomplished when political will is mustered.

In 2000, the OSCE monitored elections in Croatia, Tajikistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Albania, Macedonia, the Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. Although OSCE election reports were generally accurate in identifying flaws, the decisions to send full assessment missions to Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan, and even the limited assessment mission it sent to Belarus, risked according legitimacy to electoral processes that were deeply, structurally flawed. OSCE officials argued that their presence during these elections was necessary to document electoral abuses and develop recommendations for improved processes. Unfortunately, 2000 saw little progress made in implementing OSCE recommendations developed in the course of monitoring past flawed votes in, for example, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The OSCE also organized the October municipal elections in Kosovo, pushing ahead under international pressure to demonstrate progress in peace implementation, although political and ethnic violence and attacks on journalists indicated at the time of writing that the elections would not likely meet OSCE standards.

Having failed to use the opportunity of the 1999 Istanbul summit to obtain any lasting human rights improvements in Turkey, the OSCE and its “human dimension” mechanisms remained underutilized in that country, where, had there been the political will, they might have made a significant contribution to the Turkish government’s efforts to comply with E.U. accession criteria relating to democratization, rule of law, and minority rights.

The year saw continued OSCE efforts to address women’s human rights issues, with the adoption of a Gender Action Plan in June and a special “human dimension” seminar to identify measures to combat trafficking. The apparent downgrading of the position of the gender advisor in the Vienna secretariat did not, however, bode well for efforts to implement these plans.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe’s profile expanded significantly in 2000, as the organization engaged in new and unprecedented field activities, technical assistance missions, and election monitoring activities with mixed results for human rights conditions.

Among international organizations, the Council of Europe enjoyed the most extensive dialogue with the Russian government regarding its conduct in Chechnya. The council’s commissioner for human rights, the council-based European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, and several delegations from the its Parliamentary Assembly visited Moscow and the North Caucasus, condemned violations committed by both sides to the conflict, and urged steps to curb abuses and bring about an end to the conflict. The secretary general invoked for the first time article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights to request information from the Russian government regarding implementation of the convention in Chechnya and in April the Parliamentary Assembly suspended the voting rights of the Russian parliamentary delegation.
In response, the Russian government accepted deployment in Chechnya of a three-person Council of Europe team of experts to assist the office of Russian President Putin’s Special Representative for Human Rights in Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamanov. This team, the only international personnel with a human rights mandate permitted to operate in Chechnya, surely made a positive contribution to the work of Kalamanov’s office. At the same time, its deployment raised serious concerns that the Russian government was “forum shopping,” essentially looking for the weakest institution that it could engage in order to avoid a stronger international reaction.

Indeed, the Council of Europe deployment was used by representatives of the U.S., the E.U., and other governments and institutions as an argument against creating an international commission of inquiry, even though Kalamanov and the Council of Europe staff working with him had no authority to investigate or prosecute alleged atrocities. Council member states also used the deployment as an excuse to forego more robust action, such as a lawsuit against the Russian Federation before the European Court of Human Rights, or a Committee of Ministers’ action to monitor Russia’s conduct in Chechnya or to expel Russia from the council. The deployment also weakened the case for an OSCE presence and gave the Russian authorities an argument against compliance with the U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution. Council of Europe officials argued that it was better for them to be in Chechnya than not. This claim ignored the impact of their presence on the overall international response to the Chechnya crisis and the danger that the much-touted “complementarity” among international institutions in the field of human rights had, at least in Chechnya, become a race to the bottom.

Similar concerns arose over Council of Europe election assistance in Azerbaijan. Although the OSCE was already engaged in a dialogue with the Azerbaijani authorities regarding conditions for their November elections, the Council of Europe accepted an April request from the Azerbaijani government that it advise them too. Necessarily complicated by political considerations relating to Azerbaijan’s pending Council membership application, the team’s assessment of pre-election conditions sometimes conflicted with that of the OSCE.

A more productive division of labor occurred in Kosovo, where the OSCE had the task of organizing the October municipal elections and the Council of Europe ran the independent international monitoring mission.

Concerns persisted that the Council of Europe was admitting states before they were ready to live up to its human rights standards. In June, the Parliamentary Assembly voted to recommend admission for Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in a September report, the parliamentary rapporteur for Bosnia and Hercegovina’s application seemed to set aside all but one of the eight conditions previously set for that country’s admission. The prospect of premature admission of these countries heightened concern over the European Court of Human Rights’ ever-expanding caseload. The court also faced an increased unwillingness among states to abide by its judgments; offending states included long-term members.

The year saw further progress in the emerging practice of member states electing to publish reports of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, although a number of states continued to publish the reports selectively. As of August 15, 2000, the following states continued to refuse to publish at least one committee report: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Macedonia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. In the case of Turkey, no fewer than seven reports were outstanding.
North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization continued its leadership role in the peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. In Kosovo, shortages of U.N. civilian police left the NATO-led KFOR with substantial policing responsibilities. KFOR troops conducted between 500 and 750 patrols every day, guarded more than 550 sites, and manned more than 200 vehicle checkpoints. KFOR’s policing responsibilities challenged NATO troops trained for military operations, who despite some efforts to seize illegal weapons remained reluctant to detain or sanction members of the Kosovo Protection Corps or of the officially disbanded Kosovo Liberation Army implicated in political violence and attacks on Serbs, Roma, and other ethnic minorities. Although NATO claimed that half of all KFOR personnel were engaged in the protection of Serbs and other minorities, their response to violence against minorities, particularly Roma, remained inadequate. An October OSCE report on Kosovo’s justice system also criticized KFOR and UNMIK for arbitrary and prolonged detentions of suspects without charge.

Most prominent among NATO arrests of indicted war criminals in Bosnia was the April detention of Momcilo Krajisnik, the wartime president of the Bosnian Serb Assembly and a postwar member of the Bosnian presidency. Krajisnik’s arrest belied prior assertions by military and political leaders that arrests of high-ranking figures would result in protest and retaliatory attacks.

European Union

The European Union introduced the resolution on Chechnya at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Once the resolution went to a vote and passed, the E.U. was conspicuously absent from efforts to implement it. To the contrary, the late spring and summer saw European heads of government and state highly eager to meet with the new Russian President Vladimir Putin; criticism over Chechnya barely figured in these dialogues.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the E.U. broke ranks with the U.S. to offer economic assistance to Serbia’s opposition-controlled towns, and when the opposition took power in early October, the E.U. quickly lifted most country-wide sanctions. While the E.U. kept in place certain restrictions imposed on those indicted for war crimes and their allies, it failed to make a clear link between enhanced relations with the new authorities and their commitment to the international rule of law, including cooperation with the ICTY.

The year saw continued E.U. dialogue on human rights with the newly independent states in the context of Cooperation Council meetings held pursuant to the E.U.’s Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). In a welcome development, official statements emerging from these meetings made explicit reference to the need for implementation of OSCE and Council of Europe human rights standards and recommendations.

Turkey’s first year as an official candidate for membership in the E.U. produced little progress on its compliance with the human rights criteria for membership. Indeed the first few months of the year saw backtracking on positive steps taken in the run-up to the E.U.’s December decision to accord Turkey candidate status. As this report went to press, observers were awaiting publication of the E.U.’s Accession Partnership document, outlining the steps Turkey had to take to prepare itself for E.U. membership. Rights
groups feared that the Accession Partnership would lack depth and specificity regarding needed reforms particularly in such areas as minority rights, which were controversial in Turkey, or the restrictions on the headscarf, which were controversial in Europe. They urged strict application of the Copenhagen criteria for Turkey’s E.U. admission, in a manner consistent with the approach for other applicant states.

In October 1999, the European Commission proposed that updated agreements for candidate countries seeking to join the European Union, including Hungary and the Czech Republic, make the improvement of the situation of Roma a short and medium term priority.

**United States**

U.S. officials repeatedly expressed concern over alleged atrocities in Chechnya and claimed that other aspects of U.S.-Russian relations would not compromise their response to these abuses. The U.S. government’s lack of action on Chechnya belied this assertion.

At the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, when negotiations over a consensus chairman’s statement acceptable to the Russian government broke down, the U.S. became a late cosponsor of the resolution on Chechnya.

President Clinton’s June, July, and September meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin yielded no progress on accountability for abuses in Chechnya nor on compliance with the demands of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and the OSCE Assistance Group.

A travel ban imposed by the U.S. embassy in Moscow kept U.S. government officials from traveling to the North Caucasus to monitor and document the atrocities first-hand. This represented a stark contrast to U.S. and E.U. practice in Kosovo, where beginning in mid-1998, military attaches in Belgrade conducted regular, coordinated missions to Kosovo to monitor the conduct of Serb security forces. U.S. government personnel apparently made no concerted effort to monitor the status of Russian investigations of the abuses, although regular communication with responsible prosecutors would certainly have sent an important signal regarding U.S. expectations for the accountability process.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the U.S., like the E.U., welcomed the opposition’s rise to power by lifting most sanctions. U.S. officials continued to promise that former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic would eventually be tried by the ICTY, but they refused to make any clear link between the extent of their support for new Yugoslav leader Vojislav Kostunica and his cooperation with the tribunal.

Close political and military ties between the U.S. and Turkey continued to dominate human rights concerns in that country. When the Turkish military announced in mid-year that it had chosen a U.S. manufacturer to supply U.S. $4 billion in attack helicopters, the U.S. government appeared to waver in its promise to condition the sale on human rights improvements to which President Clinton and then-President Mesut Yilmaz agreed in late 1997. A decision on the export license for the helicopters was not expected before early 2001.

**Russian Federation**

While the conduct of Russian government forces in Chechnya was among top human rights concerns in the region, the Russian government also stood to have a significant impact on human rights elsewhere. In September Russia became the 112th state to sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court, further
isolating the U.S. and China as the sole remaining opponents to the court among Security Council permanent members. The extent of Russian commitment to the principles of international humanitarian law were, however, seriously called into question by its continued failure to rein in its troops in Chechnya and to prosecute soldiers responsible for abuses. The Russian government’s disregard for international rule of law was also illustrated in May when it played host in Moscow to Yugoslav Minister of Defense Dragolub Ojdanic, an indicted war criminal, in what it later claimed was the result of an administrative error (the government had an obligation under Security Council resolutions to arrest Ojdanic).

**International Financial Institutions**

International financial institutions made some progress toward addressing human rights issues related to prospects for economic development in the region. A welcome development came in the form of decisions by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to suspend financing in Turkmenistan due to the autocratic regime’s corruption and utter resistance to reform. Unfortunately, these decisions did not dissuade the Asian Development bank from allowing Turkmenistan to become a member in August.

The World Bank’s continued disbursement of structural adjustment loan payments to the Russian government without reference to abuses committed in Chechnya was a disappointment, standing in stark contrast to the bank’s approach on abuses in West Timor. While refusing to make the link to Chechnya, both the World Bank and the EBRD demonstrated a growing appreciation of the need for institutional reform and improved governance in Russia.

Representatives of the international financial institutions repeatedly acknowledged the impact of corrupt and abusive law enforcement agencies on efforts to combat corruption and ensure the rule of law in the region, but they remained largely resistant to the idea of addressing needed criminal law reform through their own conditionality and technical assistance.

**The Work of Human Rights Watch**

Based on the model of the organization’s work last year on Kosovo, Human Rights Watch launched an emergency response to the massive abuses in Chechnya, which together with Central Asia and postwar Kosovo, remained top priorities throughout the year.

When the war in Chechnya entered its deadly stage in late autumn 1999, Human Rights Watch deployed a rotating team of researchers to Ingushetia, where the majority of people displaced by the conflict had fled. We used this six-month research presence to document humanitarian law violations by both Russian and Chechen rebel forces, to press the international media to cover what had been an underreported conflict, and to use research results in timely advocacy with the Russian government and the international community.

Researchers interviewed more than 750 displaced people and immediately exposed abuses they experienced in a series of press releases. Three reports published in February, April, and June documented massacres of civilians by Russian forces in sweep operations: *Civilian Killings in Staropromyslovski District of Grozny*, *“No Happiness Remains”: Civilian Killings, Pillage, and Rape in Alkhan-Yurt, Chechnya*, and *February 5: A Day of Slaughter in Novye Aldi*. In October, a fourth report, *“Welcome to Hell”: Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Extortion in Chechnya*, documented torture in Russian detention centers in the
region. Researchers in the region worked with the international community and Russian agencies to ensure better protection to displaced persons as Russian forces attempted to pressure them to return prematurely to their homes.

Throughout the year we urged international institutions and governments to send representatives to the region to bear witness to the abuse, and to press the Russian government to stop abuses and to launch a credible accountability process. We engaged the World Bank, in letters and meetings, to withhold installments of structural adjustment loans and to link disbursements to the Russian government with compliance with its international humanitarian law obligations.

Since the Russian authorities did not conduct credible inquiries or institute criminal proceedings in response to abuses in Chechnya, we urged the international community to do so. To this end we formed a coalition of Russian and international human rights organizations to urge Council of Europe member states to file an interstate complaint against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights. We conducted advocacy at three sessions of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly to ensure that it would appropriately censure Russia, and urged the assembly to adopt resolutions calling for a rigorous domestic accountability process and calling on member states to file an interstate complaint. In a series of exchanges with the office of the secretary general and the departments for political affairs and human rights, we also cautioned the council about the potential pitfalls of sending its staff to work in the office of President Vladimir Putin’s special representative on human rights in Chechnya.

Human Rights Watch also sought to have an international commission of inquiry established by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The organization urged the high commissioner for human rights to call for such a commission, and engaged member states to adopt a resolution to this effect at its fifty-sixth session. After the commission adopted a resolution calling for a national commission of inquiry and the deployment of thematic mechanisms, Human Rights Watch published a memorandum outlining Russia’s failure to comply with the resolution and urged member states, particularly the U.S. and E.U., to call Russia to account. It was with this aim that we engaged U.S. president Bill Clinton in advance of his summit meeting with President Putin, and the E.U. in advance of its summit with the Russian government. In other advocacy, the organization testified twice before the U.S. Congress to emphasize that many of the abuses in Chechnya were effectively war crimes and twice before the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly. The goals with respect to Chechnya at the OSCE focused on the redeployment of the Assistance Group to Chechnya. Recommendations on Chechnya were reinforced in opinion articles in the U.S. and European media.

Through field offices in Tashkent and Dushanbe, the organization continued to document the worsening human rights crisis in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan. Researchers undertook fact-finding missions in seven regions of the country to document and publicize the arbitrary arrests and torture of hundreds of people accused of “religious extremism” and to monitor dozens of trials. The Human Rights Watch Tashkent office regularly urged the international community to monitor trials, briefed the diplomatic community about human rights developments, and brought victims of abuse together with visiting high-level officials from the U.S. and E.U. A mission to three regions of the country documented how government agencies at all levels compounded the problem of domestic violence by pressuring women to remain in abusive marriages.

The organization’s Dushanbe office gathered information on civil and political rights violations relevant to the November 1999 presidential elections and the February 2000 parliamentary vote. In November 1999,
a report was presented, *Freedom of Expression Still Threatened*, which documented the dramatic increase in harassment of and restrictions on the media, to the Tajik government in a series of high-level meetings. The organization launched an advocacy initiative in advance of both elections, publishing backgrounders detailing flagrant violations and addressing letters to the government urging redress. The Dushanbe office also regularly briefed members of the international community on human rights developments in the country.

The Europe and Central Asia Division strove to make the human rights crisis in Central Asia a priority issue among international actors, particularly the United Nations and the OSCE. This was also raised with U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson in February 2000 and in meetings with staff members for the U.N. special rapporteur on torture, the Working Group on Arbitrary Arrests and Disappearances, and the Committee against Torture, urging them to request visits to Uzbekistan.

Human Rights Watch focused special attention on Central Asia at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in March 2000, urging the appointment of a special rapporteur on Uzbekistan. This forum was also used to release *Leaving No Witnesses: Uzbekistan’s Campaign Against Rights Defenders*, in order to strengthen the call for a commission resolution on defenders. When Uzbek officials used U.N. Human Rights Committee complaint forms as evidence against a defendant in a religious extremism case, this was reported to relevant U.N. agencies in detailed letters.

U.N.-targeted advocacy on Tajikistan aimed to ensure a strong human rights component to the U.N.’s presence following the May 15 withdrawal of the U.N. Mission of Observers to Tajikistan (UNMOT). A memorandum, based on ongoing research, was issued on April 21, concerning the government’s poor human rights practices in the post-civil war period, and the implications that UNMOT’s limited human rights mandate had for a long-term peace in Tajikistan. The organization formulated recommendations for the follow-on mission, urging a strong human rights component to its work. Letters outlining concerns were sent to members of the Security Council, and we conducted meetings with senior U.N. representatives from the Department of Political Affairs, the Office of the Secretary-General, and with representatives from the missions of major member states.

Human Rights Watch sought to keep human rights at the top of the agenda of U.S.-Uzbekistan relations, and urged the U.S. government to use explicit conditionality under the International Religious Freedom Act and the Cooperative Threat Reduction program. This was done in meetings with the secretary of state and other top officials and in many letters and memoranda. In congressional testimony we rebutted the Clinton Administration’s argument that the crackdown in Uzbekistan qualified as political, not religious persecution.

With respect to Turkmenistan, Human Rights Watch strove to have international lending related to that countries linked strictly to human rights improvements. It urged the Department of State to declare Turkmenistan ineligible on human rights grounds for Export-Import Bank credits and urged the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to end all lending to the country. In January, Human Rights Watch also published a press release condemning the arrest of Nurberdi Nuramedov, perhaps the last remaining dissident in the country who publicly criticized the decision to extend indefinitely President Saparmurad Niazov’s term in office.

Torture and due process violations remained a chief concern in the former Soviet Union. In November 1999, Human Right released *Confessions at Any Cost: Police Torture in Russia*, the result of a two-year, multiregion research project on torture, at a press conference in Moscow. The organization held high-level
advocacy meetings with Russian government officials and urged the international community to support the creation of a torture rehabilitation center.

These same issues were of top concern in the Caucasus. Through the Human Rights Watch field office in Tbilisi, Georgia, research was conducted on torture and on the setback in legal reforms that could have helped prevent torture and other due process violations. In September, the organization released *Backtracking on Reform: Amendments Undermine Access to Justice*, at a press conference in Tbilisi. The report documented the repeal of reforms in Georgia’s criminal procedure code that would have granted criminal suspects and defendants the right to complain about due process violations directly to a court, prior to trial. Since the repeal of these reforms ran counter to Georgia’s commitments upon admission to the Council of Europe, this featured prominently in our meetings with the Council of Europe’s Monitoring Committee during its May visit to Tbilisi, and in advocacy with the Parliamentary Assembly.

Human Rights Watch advocated for the expansion of the World Bank’s work in the area of legal and judicial reforms specifically to address reform of certain aspects of criminal law and procedure. In meetings in November 1999 and in February and July 2000 we argued that Georgia’s setback in legal reform served to undermine public trust in the judiciary and hence bank programs that promote it. The organization urged the bank to adopt criminal procedure reform throughout the region as a policy trigger for future structural adjustment lending in its country assistance strategy; to expand its capacity to conduct analysis of judicial systems and criminal procedure, to enable it to identify provisions in legislation that are not in compliance with international human rights law and standards; and to assist in the formulation of lending targets in these areas.

In the run-up to Azerbaijan’s November 5 parliamentary elections, Human Rights Watch launched a month-long fact-finding mission to research civil and political rights abuses affecting the election. Researchers interviewed journalists for media outlets that were closed or fined arbitrarily, parliamentary candidates whose registration was arbitrarily denied, and opposition activists harassed by local governments.

Human Rights Watch priorities in the wake of the war in Kosovo were twofold. The organization responded to the compelling need for an independent record of the humanitarian law violations during the war. It also examined postwar human rights issues especially minority rights, due process, and freedom of movement that would have a lasting impact on efforts to build a sustainable peace in the province.

Throughout the year we assembled information on humanitarian law violations in the 1999 conflict with NATO. In March, the organization published a report documenting rape as a weapon of “ethnic cleansing” in Kosovo. The report included ninety-six cases of rape of Albanian women by Serbian and Yugoslav forces immediately before and during the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. An April Human Rights Watch report found that NATO forces had violated international humanitarian law in its bombing campaign, which resulted in the deaths of more than 500 civilians.

The organization’s strategy on post-war Kosovo was to remind the international community of the lesson learned from Bosnia: that rushed elections in postwar situations, especially in the wake of massive violence and inter-ethnic hatred, undermined longer-term prospects for the rule of law. This message was presented in a March meeting with the OSCE chair-in-office, in follow-up correspondence, and in a June memorandum to diplomats and international organizations, and in an October backgrounder for the media and other
observers of the elections. In June, we investigated access to protection and justice for minorities in Kosovo, focusing on the work of UNMIK police and KFOR. December 1999 and January 2000 meetings with the E.U. and the U.S. government raised fair-trial concerns regarding war crimes trials of Serbs before Albanian-dominated local courts in Kosovo.

Before the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic, Human Rights Watch aimed to call international attention to victims of his government’s intensified harassment and to ensure maximum international assistance to civil society. The significance of elections mandated for 2000 was anticipated, and throughout the year the organization detailed the repression of the government’s critics. A May report focused on measures the government took against civil society institutions which it perceived as a threat, including opposition parties, the independent media, student organizations, independent trade unions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civic activists in Serbia. Just prior to the elections, the organization published a backgrounder detailing how the authorities set about rigging the elections.

When Milosevic left office, Human Rights Watch deployed a researcher to Belgrade to identify a new human rights agenda for Yugoslavia: release of Kosovo Albanian political prisoners, cooperation with the ICTY as part of the general restoration of the rule of law, restoring the independence of the judiciary, and justice for past abuses by security forces. In a series of letters and press releases, Human Rights Watch called for the international community to adopt a policy on cooperation vis a vis Serbia consistent with that practiced throughout the Balkans.

In Croatia, the organization focused on minority rights and other basic civic freedoms in the transition from Tudjman period. A report published in December 1999, in anticipation of elections in early 2000, outlined violations of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. After the election of President Stjepan Mesić and formation of a new government under Prime Minister Ivica Racan, Human Rights Watch wrote to both leaders, recommending legislative and administrative measures to ensure equal treatment for all Croatian citizens, including minorities, to promote the return of Serb refugees and the reform the country’s state broadcaster. In Croatia, we focused on minority rights and other basic civic freedoms in the transition from Tudjman period. A report published in December 1999, in anticipation of elections in early 2000, outlined violations of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Research and advocacy on Bosnia focused on two aspects of refugee return: keeping the donor community engaged, identifying minority returns as an essential element for a lasting peace and the rule of law, and ensuring that progress on returns remained a condition for Council of Europe accession. In May Human Rights Watch published *Unfinished Business: Return of Displaced Persons and Other Human Rights Issues in Bijeljina*, which documented how authorities in that city obstructed the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement by providing neither protection nor equal rights to the Bosniak community there, and by actively deterring the return of Bosniaks who were driven from the city during the war. We continued with research in 2000 to investigate impediments to minority returns, including decrease in donor assistance, persistent failure by local authorities to enforce housing regulations, security concerns, and lack of long-term prospects for employment and education.

In Turkey research and advocacy focused on the opportunity for reform that emerged when Turkey became a candidate for membership in the European Union in December 1999. A September 2000 report outlined specific short-term steps the Turkish government should take to begin to demonstrate its willingness
to meet the E.U.’s membership criteria. Recommended steps addressed torture, restrictions on freedom of expression and religious freedom, violations of minority rights, continued instability in the southeastern part of the country, and the death penalty. Human Rights Watch pressed this agenda throughout the year with governmental interlocutors in both Brussels and Ankara.

In May, Human Rights Watch staff traveled to Ankara to meet with Ministry of Justice officials and released a report outlining our concern that their proposed prison reform measures would subject detainees to an impermissible isolation regime. A November Human Rights Watch memorandum welcomed some improvements in the planned reforms and urged additional steps be taken to ensure that it would comport with international prison standards. Research also continued on the headscarf ban and followed closely developments relating to the pending sale of U.S. $4 billion worth of U.S.-manufactured attack helicopters to Turkey.

In 2000 the organization took on migrant worker’ rights as its strategic focus in Western Europe. The multicountry project would document and expose the serious abuses committed against migrant workers in Western Europe, who were among the most vulnerable groups in that region, and the failure of states to protect their basic rights. Of particular concern were those migrant workers who worked in forced labor conditions, either in conditions of near-captivity for little or no wages or in debt bondage, where wages were immediately absorbed into repaying a “debt” owed to the employer. A fact-finding mission in October investigated these issues with respect to Greece.

Migrants and refugees were primary targets of the upsurge in xenophobia and racist violence in Western Europe in 2000. Focusing specifically on the relationship between xenophobia and many European governments’ increasingly restrictive immigration policies and practices, we promoted migrants’ rights and refugee protection in fora related to the U.N. World Conference Against Racism. Together with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the organization released a memorandum at the Strasbourg regional preparatory conference critiquing the Draft General Conclusions of the European Conference Against Racism. The memorandum highlighted measures taken by Western European governments that undermined protections for asylum seekers and migrants, giving the media, public, and state agencies an apparent rational for discriminating against them. We recommended full compliance with the 1951 refugee convention and the promotion and protection of fundamental human and labor rights for all migrants as a way to stem the growing tide of anti-foreigner sentiment and violence in Europe.

Throughout the year, Human Rights Watch highlighted the need for greater coordination on human rights protection among international institutions active in the region. The organization emphasized the need for institutional and policy linkages between political institutions engaged in monitoring and promoting human rights and an international donor community that was increasingly cognizant of the role of governance and rule of law in fostering effective development. A welcome development in this regard was the emerging E.U. practice of citing Council of Europe and OSCE recommendations and commitments in statements regarding its Cooperation Council meetings with countries in the region.

In September, the organization’s Europe and Central Asia Division participated in NGO meetings with World Bank and IMF officials organized in conjunction with those institutions’ annual meetings in Prague. Human Rights Watch joined other nongovernmental organizations in pressing the World Bank in particular to operationalize its stated commitment to human rights. In a joint statement with the Federation
Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme, the organization recommended that the bank incorporate reference to human rights law in its policies, consider appropriate human rights-related conditionality on its lending, expand the bank’s internal staff capacity to assess human rights conditions relevant to development, and coordinate closely with and support the work of international human rights bodies.