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Riots in European cities: lessons and Council of Europe response

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs
Rapporteur: Mr Daniel DUCARME, Belgium

A. Conclusions of the committee

I should first like to thank the Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, Mr Blum, for his excellent report.

This well-documented report provides a picture and a very full inventory of the highly sensitive issue of urban security.

We in Europe are indeed seeing an increase in urban violence, resulting from an unhappiness that coincides with factors connected with the rise in unemployment, young people's feeling that they have nothing to do, and, in particular, problems of integration and social exclusion.

B. Proposed amendments to the draft recommendation

Amendment A (to the draft recommendation)

Replace paragraph 9.2.7 by the phrase "introduce policies for the integration of immigrants".

Amendment B (to the draft recommendation)

Add a new paragraph after paragraph 9.2.7 worded as follows: "encourage intercultural and inter-religious dialogue".

C. Explanatory memorandum, by Mr Ducarme

1. The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, while supporting the recommendations made by the rapporteur, wishes to point out that citizens' security must remain central to the concerns of our governments and legislatures.

2. The committee wishes to point out in this context that, at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Warsaw on 16 May 2005, member states reiterated their wish to take all necessary measures to ensure security for their citizens in full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

1. See Doc. 11685, tabled by the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee.

3. The committee nevertheless notes that insufficient account is taken of these issues by governments, and that there is still no synergy between the authorities, at both national and local levels, and citizens. In practice, as the rapporteur very rightly says, it is important to rebuild the link between the state and its citizens.

4. In this context, and in order to strengthen this link, rather more account needs to be taken of the opinions, even if they are sometimes divergent, of the voluntary sector and, to a certain extent, of the media. These opinions may in fact make citizens' desires and frustrations clearer to legislatures, thereby helping the public authorities to reduce the existing malaise, especially in housing estates and sensitive areas.

5. In this context, the committee once again emphasises the importance of starting and/or strengthening intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

6. It also proposes amending the text of the draft recommendation, asking the public authorities to take measures to introduce policies for the integration of immigrants. It considers in fact that true integration policies will be far more effective than mere training programmes.

7. The committee also wishes to emphasise, as the rapporteur very rightly does, the need to begin a social dialogue, particularly with immigrant populations. This is all the more necessary for the fact that, in most of our member states, racial tensions are high. In the face of such tensions, the committee considers that support must be given to the setting up of a European resource centre for urban security, as advocated by the Congress in Recommendation 197 (2006).

8. Finally, the committee points to the need for the public authorities to take all necessary measures to improve the urban environment, in the knowledge that a poor, or even unhealthy, environment can but increase urban insecurity.

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Reporting committee: Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee (Doc. 11685).

Committee for opinion: Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs.

Reference to committee: Reference No. 3166 of 23 January 2006.

Opinion adopted by the committee on 2 October 2008.