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Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1927 (2010)

Committee of Ministers

1. Preamble

- a. Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1927 \(2010\)](#) on “Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe” brings to our attention two problematic phenomena, Islamism and Islamophobia, which pose a challenge to all Europeans – Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The religion of Islam must be separated from Islamism which is a political ideology and is not the prevailing expression of Islam today and Islamophobia is not the predominant approach towards Muslims by non-Muslim Europeans.
 - b. Muslims in contemporary Europe contribute to their societies in a multitude of ways, playing an increasingly visible role in public life. European Muslims, especially the youth, infuse new energy into existing models of social interaction, highlighting the benefits of cultural and religious diversity.
 - c. In view of the rise of intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims in Europe, as pointed out by the Parliamentary Assembly, further resolute action is required in various fora, including by the Council of Europe, to make real the rights and freedoms for all persons of all religions and convictions – Muslims, Jews, Christians and all others. Further contributions by the Parliamentary Assembly to the Council of Europe work in the area of religious freedom and the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue would therefore be very welcome, including in the framework of the 2011 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.²
2. In [Recommendation 1927 \(2010\)](#) on “Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe”, the Parliamentary Assembly raises questions of particular relevance to the challenges facing Europe’s multicultural societies.
3. In this context, the Council of Europe has a key role to play in strengthening democratic stability to counter all forms of intolerance, discrimination and extremism, including those linked to religion or non-religious belief.
4. The Committee of Ministers therefore sets particular store by activities intended to foster democracy and respect for human rights, build supportive, diverse societies and denounce all forms of intolerance. The Organisation’s Programme and Budget for 2011 were drawn up accordingly, while taking account of the priorities and processes of the current reform. In this context, with regard to the activities concerning migrants, the Committee of Ministers invites the Assembly to refer to its joint reply to Assembly Recommendations 1910 and 1917 (2010).
5. The implementation of the recommendations made in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the organisation of the Council of Europe Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue also help to achieve this goal.

1. adopted at the 1109th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (16 March 2011)

2. As in 2010, the topic of the 2011 Exchange will be “The role of the media in fostering intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding: freedom of expression of the media and respect towards cultural and religious diversity”.



6. However, the Committee of Ministers, like the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and subject to available funding, shares the view of the Parliamentary Assembly that increased action is required by the Council of Europe, to ensure freedom of thought, conscience and religion while combating religious intolerance and discrimination.
7. As the Council of Europe body responsible for combating racism and intolerance in Europe, ECRI analyses various aspects of Islamic extremism and extremism against Muslim communities in Europe. ECRI's declaration of March 2005 condemns the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic arguments in political discourse.
8. The Committee of Ministers would also draw attention to the conclusions of the Forum for the Future of Democracy, held from 19 to 21 October 2010 in Yerevan (Armenia), which in particular noted that "democratic processes can be abused by movements and ideologies which undermine and may ultimately destroy the democratic system framed by human rights and the rule of law" and that "the current rise in extremism and radicalism fuelled by racism and xenophobic discourse bears witness to this".
9. The Committee of Ministers also sees the Council of Europe's cultural, educational and youth activities as an important contribution to European integration based on the common fundamental values of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
10. As to matters relating to education and the development of knowledge about various beliefs through the education system, the Committee of Ministers would draw attention to Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. It provides principles and guidelines to be applied in education policies and institutions and in the professional development of teaching staff. The Committee of Ministers refers also, in this connection, to ECRI's general policy recommendations,³ which recommend in particular that states ensure that religious instruction in schools respects cultural pluralism and that "pupils are given an instruction on religion which complies with the scientific neutrality essential in any educational approach". It encourages the member states to draw on these recommendations and principles. The Committee of Ministers would also inform the Assembly of an initiative run jointly by the OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe and UNESCO to develop "Guidelines for educators and policy makers: combating intolerance against Muslims through education", which it is planned to launch in 2011.
11. Furthermore, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights keeps close track of the current issues and problems to which the Assembly refers in its recommendation in respect of the developments in member states and calls on the authorities and civil society to work to promote respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Europeans.
12. With regard to the Assembly's recommendations concerning Muslim women, the Committee of Ministers recalls that the rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and as interpreted in the Court's case law apply to all individuals under the jurisdiction of the high contracting parties to the Convention without discrimination. This is also the case with respect to the European Social Charter which provides the right to education, professional training and employment.
13. The Assembly stresses the importance of promoting Council of Europe values outside the Organisation's geographical scope. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers underlines the role of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) as well as of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre). It also considers that proposed initiatives to further co-operation with non-European States, including those recommended by the Assembly, should be examined in the light of a more general policy framework governing relations between the Council of Europe and neighbouring countries and take due consideration of the budgetary resources available.
14. The Committee of Ministers would recall that the Council of Europe continues to develop activities in this context – at both global and inter-regional levels – including in the framework of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union (for example through the North-South Centre and the Intercultural Cities programme) and with the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations. The Committee of Ministers would also draw the Assembly's attention to the initiative of the Government of Azerbaijan to hold a World Forum for Intercultural Dialogue in Baku from 7 to 9 April 2011, where the Council of Europe will have the opportunity to promote its values on the global level.

3. See, in particular, General Policy [Recommendation No. 5](#) on "Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims" and General Policy [Recommendation No. 10](#) on "Combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education".

15. As to the participation of non-member states in the work of ECRI, the Committee of Ministers points out that this body's activities are based on the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, along with its additional protocols and the relevant case law, and that this is one of the Council of Europe's fundamental treaties, which is not open for accession by non-member states. It is difficult to imagine how a country which is not a party to this convention and is not bound by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights could be properly monitored by ECRI.

16. The Council of Europe's priorities for 2011 include an analysis of the relevance of Council of Europe conventions. The results of this work should serve as a basis to decide, in particular, on measures aimed at increasing the visibility of some of these conventions and promoting their signature and ratification both by Council of Europe member states and non-member states.

17. Lastly, the Committee of Ministers points to the task assigned to the Group of Eminent Persons, who have been charged with opening new lines of inquiry on how to "live together". It will be extremely interested in the outcome of this work, which may provide input for the future activities of the Council of Europe.