



Doc. 12831

23 January 2012

Fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1933 (2010)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has studied Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1933 (2010) on the “Fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures” with great interest. It has brought it to the attention of member States’ governments and has forwarded it to the relevant Council of Europe bodies² for information and comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers believes that particular attention should be paid to the fight against extremism and shares the Assembly’s concerns with regard to the upsurge of certain forms of extremism in Europe. The Council of Europe can play a very important role by assisting and supporting its member States in the action they take to deal with this problem.

3. The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly’s appreciation of the important work accomplished by numerous Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, as well as the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), in assisting member States in meeting this challenge and agrees that their expertise is even more necessary in the light of the possible effects of the recent economic crisis. It also agrees concerning the need to enhance the outreach capacity and the visibility of its monitoring mechanisms, such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, in order for them to play a greater role in raising public awareness of such matters. It would highlight, in particular those of ECRI, the body responsible for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance from the perspective of the protection of human rights in the light of the European Convention on Human Rights, its additional protocols and the relevant case law. In its country-by-country monitoring reports, ECRI often considers the appropriateness of the measures taken by member States to counter all forms of extremism and makes recommendations on this subject. It also urges member States to strike a fair balance between different rights in a culturally diverse context such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in strict compliance with the rule of law and the principles of democratic society. When ECRI appraises member States’ legislation and practice with regard to expressions of racism, it draws on various legal sources, including Recommendation Rec(97)20 of the Committee of Ministers on hate speech. It uses various key documents, including the Handbook on Hate Speech and the findings and conclusions of its own expert seminar on combating racism while respecting freedom of expression.

4. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has also noted the trend towards an upsurge of some forms of extremism in Europe. It has therefore highlighted the importance of Contracting Parties’ respecting Article 6 of the Framework Convention, which invites

1. Adopted at the 1131st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (18 January 2012).

2. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY). Their observations were taken into account in this reply.



member States to take effective measures to promote mutual respect, understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. In its opinions, the Advisory Committee recommends that states take special steps to improve relations between various ethnic groups.

5. The Committee of Ministers calls on member States to implement its Recommendation Rec(97)20 on hate speech and underlines the usefulness of the Manual on hate speech elaborated by the CDDH and introduced on the occasion of the international Conference on "Human rights in culturally diverse societies: challenges and perspectives" in the Hague in 2008. The Manual, which is based on national good practices and relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights, provides guidelines to member States on the most appropriate ways of ensuring a fair balance in the exercise of different rights that may compete in a culturally diverse context, such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Following this conference, on 1 July 2009, the Committee of Ministers adopted the "Declaration on Human Rights in Culturally Diverse Societies", in which it emphasises that the preservation and promotion of a democratic society based on respect for diversity requires resolute action against all forms of discrimination. The declaration also calls on opinion leaders, including political leaders, to speak and act resolutely in such a way as to foster a climate of respect through dialogue based on a common understanding of universally recognised human rights.

6. Like the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers continues to pay special attention to the effects of the current economic crisis on extremism, racism and racial discrimination. The timing of the recommendation is particularly apt given the current global financial crisis and recession, which has led to a growing number of manifestations of racism and xenophobia. Already in 2009, in its annual reports, ECRI spoke about the direct and indirect consequences of the crises.

7. The Assembly also highlights the importance of continuing work on the issue of islamophobia, in the light of recent developments. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers draws attention to its reply to Assembly Recommendation 1927(2010) entitled "Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe", which underlines the vital role the Council of Europe can play in strengthening democratic stability in view of the upsurge of intolerance, discrimination and extremism. It highlights the advantages of cultural and religious diversity for European societies. The Committee of Ministers also draws attention to ECRI's Policy Recommendation No. 5³ which takes a look at the different aspects of extremism against Muslim communities in Europe. Its latest annual reports (2009 and 2010) concerned issues such as the negative portrayal of Muslims, particularly in certain media, and its repercussions in fields such as employment, the maintenance of law and order, immigration and education. The Committee of Ministers would point out that European governments are continuing to develop activities in this context. However, it agrees with the Assembly that greater efforts are still required notably in the fields of education and intercultural dialogue.

3. On "combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims".