Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1657 (2009)[1]

Riots in European cities: lessons and Council of Europe response

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The phenomenon referred to as a "riot" designates a reality taking diverse forms and stemming from a multitude of causes, often manifested by acts of violence directed against individuals and against the state represented by its institutions (police, firemen). The most recent urban riots, in the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, have prompted a great deal of questioning and reflection on a social situation that has changed over the last thirty years.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly reiterates its long-term concern over the issue of urban riots, as evidenced by its various reports on security and crime prevention in cities: setting up a European observatory (Recommendation 1531 (2001)), a dynamic social policy for children and adolescents in towns and cities (Recommendation 1532 (2001)) or the integration of immigrant women in Europe (Resolution 1478 (2006)).

3. The Assembly also wishes to highlight the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on the integration of migrants and on urban security.

4. Accordingly, the Assembly calls for real awareness of this phenomenon commonly known as rioting – frequently misunderstood and regarded as minor – and urges the member states to introduce strategies to prevent such outbreaks from occurring.

5. In this connection, the Assembly believes that the setting up of a resource centre for urban security would provide a means of pooling the quantities of information gathered with a view to framing effective policies.

6. The Assembly and the Council of Europe have always made equal opportunities and the combating of all forms of discrimination absolute priorities.

7. Fully aware that riots are often the result of a long process that has its roots in poverty, social exclusion and diverse forms of discrimination, the Assembly believes that equal efforts must be made towards all the citizens of European cities.

8. While every riot has its own characteristics, the Assembly believes that global, concerted solutions must be found within a cross-sectoral approach involving the different players (residents, social services, police, educational sphere).

9. For these reasons the Assembly asks the member states to:

9.1. in the area of urban planning:

9.1.1. set up urban renovation schemes as soon as possible to rehabilitate dilapidated and insalubrious housing;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 13 March 2009 (see Doc. 11685, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Blum; Doc. 11745, opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, rapporteur: Mr Hancock; and Doc. 11736, opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Ducarme).

9.1.2. build new social housing on a human scale; wherever possible, encourage large companies to develop economic activities in disadvantaged areas with a view to improving both housing and employment conditions in these areas;

9.1.3. step up urban planning projects in terms of facilities and services in peripheral urban zones;

9.1.4. promote social mixing in all urban districts. Those willing to leave the disadvantaged areas should be given more opportunities to move to new accommodation in other parts of the city or elsewhere in the country; this will also improve integration within society;

9.2. in the area of combating social exclusion:

9.2.1. introduce major policies to combat precariousness;

9.2.2. combat all forms of ethnic and social discrimination both on the labour market and in the allocation of housing, through public actions or awareness-raising campaigns;

9.2.3. introduce employment policies both promoting the recruitment of residents of disadvantaged areas and encouraging companies to set up in those areas;

9.2.4. consider introducing tax incentives for those companies/organisations who agree to take on board more people from disadvantaged areas;

9.2.5. step up efforts to build awareness and understanding among communities living on housing estates with respect to state services (police, firemen, administrative services);

9.2.6. support and intensify the efforts of the social and medical services and the voluntary sector working to maintain social bonds;

9.2.7. introduce quotas for children from disadvantaged areas to allow easier access to educational institutions and sponsorship or scholarships;

9.2.8. promote educational policies providing better career guidance for the younger members of communities, notably towards highly specialised fields, including skilled self-employment;

9.2.9. confirm a policy of integration and increase programmes aimed at integrating immigrants;

9.2.10. encourage intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;

9.3. in the area of improving the state's role:

9.3.1. encourage the integration of migrants through creating opportunities for their greater participation in public life and granting the right to vote at local level, in line with Assembly Resolution 1618 (2008) on measures to improve the democratic participation of migrants;

9.3.2. encourage community policing initiatives with a view to closer interaction between the population in difficult areas and law-enforcement officials;

9.3.3. help improve community policing by assisting the training of police officers;

9.3.4. improve training for law-enforcement agencies with respect to both preventing and dealing with riots;

9.3.5. entrust action against all forms of crime on housing estates to experienced police officers;

9.3.6. combat all infringements of human rights, particularly in the areas of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and above all police brutality;

9.3.7. place emphasis on mediation and conciliation;

9.3.8. condemn, investigate and punish any excessive and unjustified use of force;

9.3.9. support and reinforce the role of local authorities in taking effective action and preventing new outbreaks of rioting;

9.4. as regards the coverage and presentation of these events, the media should be encouraged to:

9.4.1. avoid any excessive and caricatural depictions of riots;

9.4.2. carry out research and comparative analysis on long-term consequences of the limited coverage or total absence of coverage of violent riots in the media;

9.4.3. avoid propagating stereotypes and other prejudices regarding life on housing estates and their residents;

9.4.4. promote the representation of people from diverse backgrounds in the media.