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Living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1975 (2011)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers considers the report of the Group of Eminent Persons a timely initiative in that it places at the centre of the debate certain essential topical questions which present themselves to all member States, such as how to reconcile diversity and social cohesion and the rights and responsibilities of all people, nationals and non-nationals alike. The Committee of Ministers considers that these questions should be addressed coherently at European level, in full compliance with the fundamental rights and freedoms secured by the European Convention on Human Rights and having regard to national circumstances. It welcomes the interest shown by the Parliamentary Assembly in the implementation of the proposals and recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons.

2. After the presentation and the initial discussion of the report on the occasion of the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers in May 2011 in Istanbul, the Committee of Ministers held two thematic debates on possible further action. The Committee of Ministers based its analysis of the possible follow-up on a reference document recapitulating the various Council of Europe achievements in the fields dealt with. Considering the wealth and relevance of these achievements, it concluded that it was important above all to strengthen the Organisation's existing instruments and tools and ensure their implementation in the most effective possible way. The report and the question of "living together" were also highlighted by the Group of Eminent Persons on the occasion of the Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue held in November 2011 in Luxembourg.

3. The Committee of Ministers shares the concerns of the Parliamentary Assembly expressed in paragraph 4 of its recommendation concerning the growing populist, xenophobic and similar rhetoric, sometimes used for short-term electoral purposes. It agrees with the Parliamentary Assembly as to the need for member States to put in place effective policies to prevent these negative phenomena that require a resolute response from governments, education institutions, media and international organisations. Many member States already implement such policies which include programmes for combating discrimination in various fields as well as training programmes for police, border guard and other law enforcement authorities to improve their effective response to hate crimes, increase their awareness of discrimination problems and enhance their intercultural competences. More efforts are needed to prevent hate speech and violence against any person, including against migrants and persons belonging to minorities (this terminology being understood in accordance with national legislation). The Council of Europe, relying on the important work and expertise of ECRI and its other monitoring mechanisms, should further support member States, upon their request, in developing appropriate laws, policies and educational programmes as well as providing training for public authorities and teachers. The Committee of Ministers is convinced that the resolute promotion of human rights and attitudes of tolerance and respect for all persons is the appropriate response to cases of hate speech and violence.

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4. The Committee of Ministers also refers to the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue which presents diversity as a resource and advocates an intercultural and intersectoral approach. The Committee of Ministers encourages member States of the Council of Europe to actively use the White Paper in their work to promote intercultural dialogue.

5. The Organisation is working in this direction. For instance, the education sector conducts activities and programmes intended specifically to develop intercultural proficiencies and provide quality education for all. It is appropriate to mention, *inter alia*, the training of teachers and teacher trainers under the Pestalozzi Programme, the activities on behalf of adult migrants' language education, the linguistic and educational integration of children with a migrant background or Roma children, education for democratic citizenship and human rights in pursuance of the Council of Europe Charter on these questions (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7), the guidelines concerning intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching (Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)6) and the role of higher education in furthering democratic culture and intercultural dialogue as well as the Council of Europe's contribution to European education policy (Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6).

6. Other relevant initiatives are developed in the youth sector, particularly aimed at the social integration of young migrants, the access of young people living in culturally diverse urban neighbourhoods to social rights, the combat of hate speech on the Internet and the competence building of young Roma ("Roma Youth Action Plan"). In the social cohesion sector, initiatives are taken to act against the poverty of migrants and with regard to respect of social rights, the provisions of the European Social Charter have a crucial bearing. The Committee of Ministers tasked the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) to conduct in the biennium 2012-2013 a study examining the feasibility and added value of standard-setting work regarding human rights in culturally diverse societies.

7. The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) raised awareness to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons at its two Civil Society Forums organised in 2011, the theme of which was "Living together". The North-South Centre has also made a contribution to the promotion and visibility of the Group of Eminent Persons' report. It was presented at the 2011 Lisbon Forum (3-4 November 2011), at the Conference "Women as agents of change in the South Mediterranean region" (Rome, 24-25 October 2011) and at the 4th Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations (Doha, 11-13 December 2011). The North-South Centre is also guided by the report for its activities in the youth field (chiefly in the context of young people's universities and development) and in that of education (particularly as part of the preparation of the Pan-European Congress on Global/Development Education dealing with education for world citizenship).

8. The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210) should be seen as a contribution to achieving greater equality between women and men and as a means of overcoming some of the causes and consequences of the marginalisation of women in a situation of vulnerability.

9. The Council of Europe Development Bank finances investment projects presented by its member States, which contribute to the integration of vulnerable populations, aimed in particular at migrants and Roma.

10. The Council of Europe and the European Union are running several joint programmes along these lines, particularly the Intercultural Cities project, the European Academic Network on Romani Studies, the Programme "Shaping perceptions and attitudes to realise the diversity advantage" (SPARDA) and, founded on the results of the Campaign "Speak out against discrimination", the MARS programme – Media Against Racism in Sport – aimed at developing a European network of media for diversity and intercultural dialogue. Finally, a cultural policy information system² offers data for 43 Council of Europe member States on their approaches to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

11. The Committee of Ministers continued its reflection in the framework of a thematic debate in June 2012 on the theme "Living together implies having a level of common competences as regards intercultural and democratic dialogue, as well as a system of attitudes, behaviour and common values. Can these be taught?". Furthermore, in the framework of its chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, Albania will organise in November 2012, in Tirana, a High-level Conference on: "Diversity in Europe, an asset for the future"; "Promoting intercultural dialogue – a task for society as a whole in Europe and beyond" and "The role of education and the contribution of young people towards promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and better integration in society", as important elements of "Living together".

2. Compendium, <http://www.culturalpolicies.net>