



Doc. 13789

19 May 2015

Threats against humanity posed by the terrorist group known as "IS": violence against Christians and other religious or ethnic communities

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2055 (2014)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2055 (2014) on "Threats against humanity posed by the terrorist group known as "IS": violence against Christians and other religious or ethnic communities", whereby the Assembly "draws attention once again to the situation of Christian and other religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East, in general, and in Iraq and Syria in particular". The Committee of Ministers has brought it to the attention of the governments of member States and forwarded it to the competent bodies for information and comments.²

2. The Committee of Ministers shares the concerns of the Assembly about the danger which the terrorist group "ISIS", also known as Daesh, represents. The violent acts it perpetrates against those who do not share its views and beliefs pose a serious threat to the lives and enjoyment of fundamental rights of those people in the regions under its control, and for peace and security in the whole Middle East and beyond. In the face of this wave of violence, and the resulting grave humanitarian consequences for the population, the international community must unite its efforts to combat terrorism, radicalisation and extremism, protect and promote human rights, and provide appropriate support for populations in difficulty.

3. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in early 2015 painfully reminded European societies of the reality of this threat and illustrated the urgent need for actions to combat radicalisation leading to terrorism, in full respect for the Council of Europe values and standards. The Committee of Ministers strongly condemns these acts and calls for a strengthening of the Council of Europe's actions. The Committee of Ministers has already adopted several decisions to this effect, in particular with a view to producing a draft Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. Furthermore, it has decided that the next Ministerial Session should give due prominence to the fight against extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. It is expected that the Session will adopt an Action Plan on this subject.

4. The Council of Europe is already carrying out a number of activities in the field of intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension, in particular since the publication of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. In this regard, the Committee of Ministers welcomes the interest which the Assembly attaches to the Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. It has taken note of the proposals the Assembly makes in this connection and will bear them in mind in the future.

5. The Committee of Ministers notes the Assembly's recommendation that it "envisage possible ways to monitor the situation of governmental and societal restrictions on religious freedom and related rights in Council of Europe member States and in States in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood, and report periodically to the Assembly". In this connection, the Committee of Ministers refers to its 2011 Declaration on religious freedom in which it stated in particular that "freedom of thought, conscience and religion is an

1. Adopted at the 1226bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (6 May 2015).

2. Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).



inalienable right" and that "there can be no democratic society based on mutual understanding and tolerance without respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion." It has stated these principles in its 2009 Declaration on human rights in culturally diverse societies in which it recalls that "States must strive to strike a fair balance" between freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, "while ensuring that any restriction be prescribed by law, necessary in a democratic society and proportionate to a legitimate aim."

6. The work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reflects the above recommendation of the Assembly, since, in compliance with its Statute, it examines the substance and effectiveness of member States' laws, policies and other measures to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance. As part of its country monitoring work, ECRI regularly examines the situation of persons belonging to ethnic and religious communities. ECRI has also drafted General Policy Recommendations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (GPR No. 5) and the fight against anti-Semitism (GPR No. 9). It has also covered violent crime, hate speech, discrimination, and intolerance towards Christians.

7. The Commissioner for Human Rights also monitors these questions, in particular during his visits to member States, and where necessary makes recommendations to promote the respect of rights of persons belonging to communities or minorities and combat intolerance and discrimination.

8. Mention should also be made of the Venice Commission's studies and reports on the relationship between freedom of religion or belief on the one hand and freedom of expression on the other hand, as well as on non-citizens rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as of the work – both completed and ongoing – of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) to collate existing Council of Europe standards regarding the principles of freedom of thought, conscience and religion and their links with other rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular freedom of expression and freedom of association. This compilation will be supplemented by a compendium of national good practices on the implementation of the existing standards. The next stage in this work will be to draw up guidelines on the protection and promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies in order to provide guidance to member States to enhance the effective application of Council of Europe standards in this field.