Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
http://assembly.coe.int
1949.2019
COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2275 (2019)[1]

The role and responsibilities of political leaders in combating hate speech and intolerance

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe is facing an upsurge in hate speech, encompassing all forms of expression which spread, incite to, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, immigrants and people of immigrant origin, women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

2. The political arena is no exception to this worrying trend: hate speech and intolerance have become part of political discourse, where they are used not only by populist and extremist groups but increasingly by representatives of movements and parties across the political spectrum. Information technology has significantly contributed to spreading and amplifying hate speech, therefore trivialising it in the eyes of the general public.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned by the threat posed by hate speech, which dehumanises the individuals and groups it targets, making them more vulnerable to stigmatisation, discrimination and violence. Hate speech erodes the social fabric and hinders peaceful living together in diversity. It produces a feeling of exclusion among minority groups and can contribute to alienation, marginalisation, the emergence of parallel societies and, ultimately, radicalisation. When used in political debate, it becomes a barrier to constructive dialogue between political forces and it undermines democratic values.

4. The Assembly considers that the most effective way of preventing hate speech is to strengthen adherence to the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to promote a model of society that embraces diversity and respects human dignity. Politicians, along with other public figures, have a vital role to play in this process. Their status and visibility allow them to influence a wide audience and to define to a significant degree the themes and the tone of public discourse.

5. In fact, politicians have both a political obligation and a moral responsibility to refrain from using hate speech and stigmatising language, and to condemn promptly and unequivocally its use by others, as silence may be interpreted as approval or support. The enhanced protection of freedom of expression that they enjoy also strengthens their responsibility in this area.

6. The Assembly believes that a wide range of measures is necessary to counter hate speech, ranging from self-regulation, particularly by political movements and parties, and in the statutes and rules of procedure of national and local elected bodies, to civil, administrative and criminal legislation prohibiting and sanctioning its use, which should be considered as a last resort. Restrictions and sanctions should be proportionate and should not be misused to silence minorities or to suppress criticism.

7. Self-regulatory instruments adopted by political parties, such as statutes and charters, are particularly effective and more likely to be respected due to their voluntary nature. The Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society, drawn up in 1998 under the auspices of the European Union Consultative Commission on Racism and Xenophobia, provides guidance for self-regulation by political parties in this area.

---

1. *Assembly debate* on 10 April 2019 (14th and 15th Sittings) (see Doc. 14845, Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Elvira Kovács). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 10 April 2019 (15th Sitting).

To be relevant in the present times, however, it should be updated to take into account different forms of hatred, based on all grounds, and the technical means currently used to spread it. It should also redress one of its main weaknesses, namely the lack of measures addressing breaches of the charter.

8. The media, including social media, should play an important role in limiting the impact of hate speech by providing accurate, unbiased information and not giving excessive visibility to instances of stigmatising or abusive language, including by political leaders.

9. The Assembly refers to the exchange of letters between the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the main players in information technology to promote an open and safe internet, where human rights, democracy and the rule of law are respected in the online environment, as a useful example of dialogue and co-operation with internet intermediaries.

10. The Assembly commends the work conducted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in this area and supports, in particular, its General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate Speech which indicates a wealth of measures on preventing and combating hate speech, providing support for those targeted by it, and calling for self-regulation by public and private institutions, including elected bodies and political parties.

11. The Assembly recalls its No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, a network of parliamentarians who commit to taking an open, firm and proactive stand against racism, hatred and intolerance on whatever grounds and however they manifest themselves, as an example of a forum for discussion and exchange of good practices that should be replicated in national parliaments. It also recalls the No Hate Speech Movement and that, although the Council of Europe campaign came to an end in 2017, its national committees continue to be active.

12. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

12.1. monitor the situation as regards hate speech, including in political discourse, and collect accurate, comparable data on its nature and prevalence, disaggregated by grounds of discrimination, target groups, types of perpetrators and channels used;

12.2. implement ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15, by adopting relevant administrative, civil and, as a last resort, criminal law provisions;

12.3. encourage political movements and parties to adopt self-regulation instruments, such as codes of conduct and ethical charters, which prohibit and sanction the use of hate speech by their members;

12.4. encourage the media to provide accurate, unbiased and responsible information in matters relevant to individuals or groups that are vulnerable to discrimination and hatred;

12.5. engage in dialogue and co-operation with internet intermediaries, in particular social media, to encourage them to adopt and apply self-regulation texts to prevent and sanction the use of hate speech and commit to removing offensive content;

12.6. promote information and awareness-raising activities addressed to politicians and elected representatives at all levels, focusing on initiatives and measures adopted to counter hate speech and intolerance, including at international level, such as the Charter of European Parties for a Non-Racist Society and the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance;

12.7. provide public officials with training on fundamental rights, equality and non-discrimination, particularly in schools and other educational institutions and in contexts where institutional discrimination may take place, including in police forces and the judiciary, the armed forces, legal services and the medical profession;

12.8. promote awareness-raising activities targeting the general public on racism and intolerance, and hate speech specifically;

12.9. support the national committees of the No Hate Speech Movement campaign;

12.10. encourage politicians to disseminate, including on social media, positive messages in relation to minorities in their countries.

13. The Assembly calls on the parliaments of member States, as well as the parliaments enjoying the status of observer or partner for democracy, to:

13.1. provide parliamentarians and other political actors with information and training on how to prevent, identify and react to hate speech on- and offline, as well as on human rights, equality and non-discrimination, and the malignant use of social networks and other media, including disinformation;

13.2. ensure that their statutes and rules of procedure contain specific provisions against hate speech and stigmatising language, sanctions for non-compliance and accessible complaints mechanisms;

13.3. establish study groups with the participation of parliamentarians, experts and civil society representatives, to monitor hate speech and recommend measures to address it at national level.

14. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that the 25th anniversary of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which falls in 2019, provides a good opportunity to update the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society, including measures for breaches of the charter, and to relaunch it.