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Lessons for the future from an effective and rights-based response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2174 (2020)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2174 \(2020\)](#) on “Lessons for the future from an effective and rights-based response to the Covid-19 pandemic”. It welcomes the reactivity and continued attention of the Assembly to the pandemic and its aftermath.

2. Like the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, together with its intergovernmental committees, the monitoring mechanisms and other main bodies and institutions of the Organisation, took rapid and effective action to contribute to the efforts to overcome the crisis while respecting human rights and democratic principles. In April, the Committee adopted a Declaration on the Covid-19 pandemic in which it underlined “its deep and constant attachment to its core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as expressed in the Statute of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights”. It also recalled that “measures to combat the disease and its wider consequences must be taken in accordance with the Organisation’s principles and the commitments entered into by member States”.

3. The Committee of Ministers also welcomed in particular the Secretary General’s Toolkit on “Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis” which provided and continues to provide clear and useful guidance to member States during the pandemic. In this context, important events have also been organised, such as an Organisation-wide videoconference on lessons learned from the crisis, which gathered all member States and heads of Council of Europe institutions and bodies, including the President of the Parliamentary Assembly. Regarding the activities specifically related to health, the Committee would draw attention to the valuable contribution brought by the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and HealthCare (EDQM) to support public health care during the pandemic,² as well as to the importance of specialised Council of Europe legal instruments in this field, such as the Council of Europe Convention on the Counterfeiting of Medical Products and Similar Crimes Involving Threats to Public health (the MEDICRIME Convention). The Committee of Ministers supports the calls of the Secretary General and the MEDICRIME Convention Committee to step up the member States’ commitment to fighting the falsification of medical products by signing and/or ratifying this treaty.

4. The Committee of Ministers will continue to examine the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, including the response given by individual member States, and by other relevant European and international organisations and bodies. In this context, the Committee refers to the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers’ recent Greek Chairmanship on “Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law” issued on the occasion of the 130th Ministerial Session on 4 November 2020 in Athens. It also refers to the recently prepared document of the Secretary General “A Council of Europe contribution to support member States in addressing healthcare issues in the context of the present public health crisis and beyond”³ and the follow-up to be given thereto. The Committee of Ministers stresses the particular importance of protecting and promoting human rights, including social rights, which have been severely impacted by the pandemic.

1. Adopted at the 1396th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (17 February 2021).

2. <https://www.edqm.eu/en/edqms-contributions-protection-public-health-covid-19-pandemic-latest-information>



5. With regard to the specific recommendation to “urgently re-establish an intergovernmental committee on public health”, the Committee of Ministers recalls that the European Health Committee (CDSP) was one of the oldest bodies of the Organisation, created in 1954 to encourage closer European co-operation on the promotion of health. It notes the Assembly’s view that the reestablishment of such a committee could strengthen intergovernmental co-operation and co-ordination in the field of public health, including with regard to ensuring effective preparedness for and reaction to pandemics. The Committee of Ministers underlines the importance of ensuring that intergovernmental committees reflect the key strategic priorities of the Council of Europe. It will bear in mind the Assembly’s recommendation, whilst taking into account the lessons learned from the pandemic, the activities already being carried out within this Organisation, and in other European and international bodies, as well as the budgetary situation of the Organisation.