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The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion: a new Charter for a non-racist society

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Sir Tony LLOYD, United Kingdom, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy congratulates the rapporteur, Mr Momodou Malcolm Jallow (Sweden, UEL), for his very timely and well-prepared report on “The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion”, and for his excellent proposals on a revised Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-racist Society.
2. The committee stresses that political parties have an imperative to act responsibly while fighting for their ideas and values. Party leaders, in particular, are some of the most visible and influential figures in our societies. For these reasons, the committee wholeheartedly supports a dedicated effort by the Parliamentary Assembly to revise, broaden the scope of, and promote a new Charter specifically for political parties on the theme of inclusion and anti-discrimination.
3. The committee welcomes that the scope of the Charter in terms of the types of discrimination covered has been substantially expanded. It also welcomes that the Charter now includes explicit references to online communications and social media.
4. In order to ensure that the Charter will have a tangible positive impact on political discourse in Europe, the committee considers it important to encourage political groups in the Assembly to circulate the Charter and for the Assembly to establish a follow-up procedure to assess the extent of the Charter’s adoption.
5. The committee welcomes the accountability elements added to the revised Charter, as well as the call for parties to introduce independent complaints processes.

B. Proposed amendment to the draft resolution

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

Replace paragraph 8.2 with the following two paragraphs:

“calls on national parliaments of Council of Europe member States to endorse the Charter, and on political groups and national delegations in the Assembly to promote it among their members;

invites the European Parliament to endorse the Charter and promote it among its political groups;”

1. Reference to committee: [Doc.15329](#), Reference 4598 of 27 September 2021. Reporting committee: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. See [Doc. 15535](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 17 May 2022.



Justification: it is important to encourage more directly political groups and national delegations of the Assembly to promote the Charter, and to separate the call to Council of Europe-related institutions with the invitation to the European Parliament.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Sir Tony Lloyd, rapporteur for opinion

1. I wish to congratulate our colleague Mr Momodou Malcolm Jallow of Sweden for his report on behalf of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination on “The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion: a new Charter for a non-racist society”.
2. In particular, the report includes a concrete contribution which has a high potential to greatly improve political discourse in our societies: a new, revised “Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist and Inclusive Society”. This tool can serve as an important benchmark to ensure that all political parties strive towards the same goal of rejecting all forms of racism and intolerance, hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and harassment.
3. As one of the main drivers of political discourse, political parties have an imperative to act responsibly while fighting for their ideas and values. Likewise, party leaders are some of the most visible and influential figures in our societies, and their words carry significant weight in determining what is acceptable and what constitutes a step too far. For these reasons, I wholeheartedly support a dedicated effort by the Parliamentary Assembly to update and promote a Charter specifically for political parties on the theme of inclusion and anti-discrimination.
4. Freedom of expression and of political belief are central to our democratic societies, and are anchored by the international human rights instruments signed and ratified by Council of Europe member States. But one’s freedom ends when the rights of another are infringed. These freedoms should not, under any circumstance, be abused to promote prejudice or intolerance on any grounds. This applies to political parties as well, which in too many cases have sought to gain electorally through division instead of inclusion.
5. Political and party leaders play a particularly important role. They should take it upon themselves to ensure a culture of respect, where sensitive topics relating to national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics are dealt with responsibly, avoiding negative stereotypes and stigmatisation.
6. I had the opportunity to discuss this aspect with Mr Jallow, among others, and I was happy to hear that he agreed on the need to emphasise the role of party leaders. On this note, I wish to thank Mr Jallow for his collaboration throughout the preparation of this report, and in particular for taking the time to exchange views on this very important topic and for his openness to my input.
7. One of the many laudable contributions of Mr Jallow’s report is that the scope of the Charter, in terms of the type of discrimination covered, has been substantially expanded. It now includes not only discrimination and hatred based on ethnic origin but also Afrophobia, antigypsyism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and xenophobia, bias against LGBTI people, and sexism.
8. This broader perspective on discrimination is particularly important given the vicious political attacks that various members of our societies have to endure. For example, as the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe noted last year, politicians and public officials in many European countries “are shamelessly targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people for political gain, fuelling prejudice and hate.”² Similarly, she has also alerted Europe to the fact that political actors are contributing to spreading disinformation, and pandering to the fears of local populations, by propagating falsehoods about migrants.³
9. In this respect, I believe it important to underscore the specific role that nationalism and populism play in driving discriminatory rhetoric by politicians. Scapegoating minorities, and framing discourse as “us versus them”, in an invented zero-sum game, has become a tactic applied by nationalist politicians across Europe to

2. www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/pride-vs-indignity-political-manipulation-of-homophobia-and-transphobia-in-europe.

3. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/human-rights-in-europe-forward-and-back-how-we-can-regain-the-ground-in-polarising-times>.

rally their base and gain power. The Assembly has already noted, in Resolution 2275 (2019), how the upsurge in hate speech witnessed in Europe included intolerance expressed by “aggressive nationalism” and was propelled by populist groups.

10. While most political parties in a given national context largely adhere to the values outlined in the Charter, what we have seen on numerous occasions, is so called “sensible parties” choosing to enter in alliance with parties that incorporate intolerance into their political and electoral messaging. For this reason, I thoroughly welcome the specific mention in the revised Charter on refraining from “any form of political alliance or co-operation at all levels with any political party which incites racial or ethnic prejudices and racial hatred”. Political parties should not only take responsibility for their own messages, but also for the alliances they forge.

11. I commend Mr Jallow for adding an explicit reference to online communication, and in particular to social media, in the revised version of the Charter. This is important for a number of reasons. First, because of the obvious power these tools can have in spreading stigmatisation, misinformation and hate speech incredibly quickly. Second, these tools also allow for a degree of dehumanising viciousness that face-to-face confrontations cannot match: while typing words on a screen, online abusers can forget – consciously or not – that other human beings are in fact reading their comments and affected by them on the other end.

12. The online fuelling of discrimination, division, and fear of “the other” is not only abhorrent in itself, but also risks putting our democracies at risk. States are increasingly confronted with mass disinformation campaigns, including fake news, which represent a direct attack on our democratic systems, and therefore on our common democratic security. Political parties can, and must, do more to ensure that no such divisive discourse is promoted online.

13. As described in Mr Jallow’s report, the goal of the Charter “is to have a tangible positive impact on the work of political parties and on political discourse in general”. In order for us to reach this objective, the journey of this document should not end after a plenary vote in the hemicycle. A strong show of support from the Assembly for a non-racist and inclusive society and for political parties’ responsibilities in this regard, will be an important and decisive start. But we will need to ensure that the Charter is widely shared throughout Council of Europe member States and is signed by as many political parties as possible.

14. The role of national parliaments in this regard will be important, as is reflected in the draft resolution. I would add, however, that political groups and national delegations in the Assembly should also take responsibility to ensure the Charter is widely shared, and thereby propose to add a reference to this effect in the draft resolution.

15. In addition to wide circulation at the outset, establishing a follow-up procedure to assess the extent of the Charter’s adoption over time will also be important, in order to assess its success and adapt the strategy as necessary. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the draft resolution makes clear that the Assembly intends to review periodically the state of implementation of the Charter.

16. Finally, I welcome the accountability section of the revised Charter. In order to ensure that the principles in the Charter are complied with, it is important for political parties to consider disciplinary sanctions for members whose words or actions undermine their party’s contribution to creating an open, inclusive and non-racist society.

17. I would add that, in addition to disciplinary measures, political parties should ensure there is an independent complaints process to deal with complaints regarding racism and intolerance, hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and harassment. In addition to helping to address instances of intolerance through a trustworthy system, it would contribute to a spirit of inclusion and openness within the party. During my conversation with Mr Jallow, I was glad to hear that he agreed with this, and I am pleased that this aspect is included in the draft resolution.