Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2511 (2023)[1]

The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Ideologies that seek to repudiate democracy, undermine human rights and ignore the rule of law are in direct opposition to the core values of the Council of Europe. The attacks of recent years by far-right extremists, both in Europe and globally, must serve as a signal of the danger posed by far-right ideology to human rights, the functioning of democratic institutions and to diverse and inclusive societies.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls the commitments taken by Council of Europe member States to abide by the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to uphold pluralism, tolerance and respect for diversity as fundamental values that underpin European societies. Extremist ideologies that threaten these principles and commitments warrant a coherent and responsible approach in order to preserve a free, secure and democratic Europe.

3. Far-right violence, driven by xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, has increased sharply in recent years. Failed coup attempts, from Germany to Brazil, and attacks on elected representatives have further demonstrated the growing danger of far-right extremism, while a number of member States consider forms of far-right terrorism to be the fastest growing or most serious domestic security threat they face.

4. The Assembly has repeatedly made clear its unequivocal condemnation of manifestations of far-right extremism. It has adopted a number of resolutions to tackle the challenge of extreme right-wing ideology, hate speech and intolerance. The evolving dynamics of modern far-right movements, the more sophisticated means of communication, the proliferation of online extremist material, the mainstreaming of far-right ideology into the public domain and the raised threat levels across a number of member States mean that it is necessary to continue to refine and adapt actions to protect against ideologies that are incompatible with human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

5. A continuing pattern of democratic backsliding in Europe provides a backdrop for the increase in actions that are against our core values and standards. The Assembly considers that the most effective way of preventing far-right extremism is to strengthen adherence to these core values.

6. The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe has given renewed impetus to the Organisation as the cornerstone of European democratic security, to the protection of our democratic foundations and to countering challenges to human rights. The Assembly welcomes the resolve of member States to stand firm against authoritarian tendencies by strengthening shared commitments.

7. Politicians and political parties should be at the forefront of responses to the phenomenon, both in the public defence of human rights and democratic principles and in the unequivocal rejection of all forms of racism and intolerance, hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and harassment.

8. Governments must ensure that there are counterweights to extremist discourse by publicly challenging the narratives of far-right extremism and ensuring that measures are in place that strengthen respect for human rights and promote a model of society that embraces diversity and respects human dignity.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 10 October 2023 (21st sitting) (see Doc. 15826, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Samad Seyidov). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 10 October 2023 (21st sitting).

9. Comprehensive approaches to tackling far-right extremist ideology are needed that seek to engage all levels of society in preventing and countering violent extremism. The Assembly emphasises the need for national action plans against extremist ideologies that include whole-of-society approaches, involving civil society, the media, educational institutions and political parties.

10. In light of reports of the elevated risk of youth radicalisation in recent years, the Assembly recalls the importance of education as a bulwark against the spread of far-right extremist ideology, and the continued need to enhance societal resilience against extremist materials and recruitment in response to the extensive use of online platforms to promote extremist ideologies.

11. The Assembly recognises the vital role played in democracies by law-enforcement personnel. While it is the case that the overwhelming majority of police officers reject extremism in all its forms, the presence of far-right extremists in police forces in a number of member States in recent years is a cause for serious concern. Individuals who reject the democratic foundations of the State cannot serve it, and the Assembly emphasises the need to ensure that effective mechanisms are implemented against extremists within the police.

12. The Assembly considers that, in light of the transnational nature of the phenomenon, enhanced co-operation between member States is necessary to tackle the pan-European dimension of the threat, and urges member States to engage in international co-operation and information sharing to effectively counter cross-border activities of far-right extremist groups.

13. The Assembly attaches great importance to the work of the bodies of the Council of Europe, notably that of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, in the monitoring, standard setting and co-operation activities for combating discrimination, racism and intolerance in our societies.

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

14.1. review and, if necessary, enhance existing legislation to effectively counter far-right extremism as well as hate speech, incitement to violence and discrimination propagated by far-right individuals and groups;

14.2. strengthen existing measures to protect groups in vulnerable and marginalised situations from discrimination, harassment and violence stemming from far-right ideology;

14.3. promote education and media literacy by integrating comprehensive education about human rights, diversity and democracy into school curricula, and enhance media literacy programmes to empower citizens to critically analyse and resist extremist propaganda;

14.4. combat online radicalisation by collaborating with social media platforms and tech companies to identify and remove online content that promotes far-right ideology, while safeguarding freedom of expression and avoiding undue censorship;

14.5. develop strategies to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated by far-right groups, ensuring that accurate and evidence-based information prevails;

14.6. continue to support civil society by providing adequate financial and moral support to civil society organisations and grass-roots initiatives working to promote tolerance, intercultural understanding, social cohesion and deradicalisation;

14.7. encourage political leaders to engage in respectful and inclusive public discourse, condemning hate speech and divisive rhetoric, and advocating for policies that uphold democratic values and human rights;

14.8. enhance the protection of elected officials from politically motivated crimes, intimidation and threats;

14.9. invite democratic parties in the member States to assess the possibility of establishing a “cordon sanitaire” against far-right parties whose values are at odds with those promoted by the Council of Europe, so as to prevent them from occupying a media and political space that helps to normalise them and propagate hate speech and discriminatory discourse.

15. To this end, the Assembly calls on member States:

15.1. as regards legislation to counter far-right extremism and enhance the protection of groups in vulnerable and marginalised situations, to:

15.1.1. ensure that legislation addressing the dissolution of political parties or prohibition of the formation of a political party complies with the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the recommendations of the European Commission for Democracy through Law;

15.1.2. elaborate potential strategies to prosecute violent extremism conducive to terrorism;

15.1.3. sign and ratify, if they have not already done so, Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 177) and the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems (ETS No. 189);

15.1.4. disseminate and fully implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech;

15.1.5. set up anti-hate crime units in police forces and provide continuing training for police forces focused on the issues of cultural diversity, equal rights and the fight against racism and aimed at raising police officers' awareness of manifestations of far-right extremism and hate speech, as well as boosting their skills in terms of identifying, preventing and tackling such crimes;

15.1.6. ensure effective mechanisms for taking action against law-enforcement personnel engaged in far-right extremist activities;

15.2. as regards the promotion of education and media literacy, combating online radicalisation and countering disinformation, to:

15.2.1. counteract extremist narratives and various forms of incitement, in line with Assembly Resolution 2221 (2018) "Counter-narratives to terrorism", through school programmes and awareness-raising campaigns underlining the shared values of human dignity, peace, non-violence, tolerance and human rights, and involve victims of extremist acts in this process;

15.2.2. develop a co-ordinated national media literacy policy, in line with Assembly Resolution 2314 (2019) "Media education in the new media environment";

15.2.3. support educational projects and teaching methods aimed at tackling anti-democratic ideologies;

15.2.4. supplement public messaging and awareness campaigns by taking active measures to address conspiracy theories and disinformation and enhance fact-checking capabilities as part of a package of measures to strengthen societal resilience against far-right propaganda;

15.2.5. ensure that internet intermediaries take effective measures to fulfil their duties and responsibilities not to make accessible or disseminate hate speech that is prohibited under criminal, civil or administrative law;

15.3. as regards supporting civil society, to:

15.3.1. support prevention policies, including through engagement with entities that work directly with youth, such as social workers and mental health workers;

15.3.2. deepen partnerships with civil society organisations that are engaged with deradicalisation, rehabilitation and victim support;

15.4. as regards upholding a respectful and inclusive political discourse, to:

15.4.1. implement the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech by adopting relevant administrative, civil and, as a last resort, criminal law provisions;

15.4.2. ensure that no public funding is allocated to parties promoting hate speech and hate crime;

15.5. as regards enhancing the protection of elected officials, to devise, in co-ordination with them, specific measures to improve their protection;

15.6. as regards the need to restore and build public trust in political institutions, to:

15.6.1. implement practical measures to strengthen democracy and governance, while ensuring the inclusion of all citizens;

15.6.2. promote participatory and inclusive democracy by fostering citizen participation in decision-making processes and encouraging active involvement by minority groups and marginalised communities, with a view to strengthening the social fabric and promoting mutual understanding, thereby reducing vulnerability to far-right extremism;

15.6.3. work actively to reduce socio-economic inequalities and disparities in society by adopting inclusive social and economic policies aimed at ensuring fair access to education, employment, healthcare and other essential services;

15.6.4. promote diversity and inclusion in political institutions so as to enable minority groups and marginalised communities to be fully represented in public institutions, with a view to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all.

16. The Assembly, in calling for a respectful and inclusive political dialogue, encourages its members to speak out against all forms of intolerance, and encourages political parties to sign the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist and Inclusive Society, as endorsed in its Resolution 2443 (2022) “The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion: a new charter for a non-racist society”.

17. The Assembly invites international organisations which share the Council of Europe’s values, starting with the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, to increase their co-operation with the Council of Europe in order to find common solutions to the shared problem of far-right extremism.