Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1438 (2000)[1]

Threat posed to democracy by extremist parties and movements in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In several member states, extremist parties and movements are propagating and defending ideologies that are incompatible with democracy and human rights.

2. These extremist movements and parties pose a threat to the fundamental values that the Council of Europe sets out to defend.

3. Currently the extremist movements and parties that pose one of the greatest threats to democracy in member states are those of the far right and, more generally, those that encourage intolerance, xenophobia and racism. Even if they do not directly advocate violence, they nevertheless create a climate that encourages its development.

4. The growing support in some countries for these extremist parties and movements is particularly disturbing.

5. The Assembly also emphasises that the violence employed by certain extreme left-wing movements in the name of combating the far right is unacceptable.

6. The Assembly, which has a particular responsibility for protecting European democratic values, must show the lead in the search for appropriate political and legal responses, especially at the preventive stage and as this type of phenomenon starts to emerge, not forgetting the necessary responses regarding young people's education and public information in order to keep alive the memory of acts and events as they really happened.

7. At national level, the political response should be aimed at depriving extremist parties of their electoral support by addressing the social and economic issues, such as unemployment, immigration and security that these parties capitalise on, and by developing policies of education for democratic citizenship based on citizens' rights and responsibilities . Moreover, measures against the abuse of asylum and illegal immigration linked to organised crime should be implemented more efficiently by the governments in order to reduce xenophobic feelings.

8. To answer the populist and over-simplified statements of these extremist parties and movements, it is necessary to re-establish the facts associated with the issues posed by immigration, reformulate poorly expressed problems in a more relevant fashion and refute illogical claims through logical argument.

9. Legislation should be enacted - where it does not exist - to prohibit oral or written instigation to racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia; freedom of expression cannot be accepted as an excuse for it. Existing legislation should be fully implemented. In this context, public denial of the Holocaust should be regarded as an expression of anti-Semitism. Using the Internet for racist purposes should be made a criminal offence.

10. Given the international dimension of extremist movements and networks of a racist or xenophobic character, co-operation between the competent authorities and police forces in Council of Europe member states should be increased.

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1. Assembly debate on 25 January 2000 (2nd Sitting) (see Doc. 8607, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Gjellerod). Text adopted by the Assembly on25 January 2000 (2nd Sitting).

11. The Assembly calls on its members to ensure that the parties they belong to base their programmes and action on respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law, together with respect for the rights of national minorities, and refuse any support for extremist parties of a racist or xenophobic character, whether explicit or implicit, and hence also any alliance whatsoever with their elected representatives in order to form majorities wielding political power.

12. The Assembly attaches great importance to the work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), an independent group of experts, which, inter alia, publishes country reports containing specific proposals. These proposals should also be taken up by national parliaments.

13. The Assembly resolves to co-operate effectively with the ECRI and hold regular debates on its activities.

14. The Assembly encourages the ECRI to identify political responses to the worrying phenomenon of the growth of extremist parties and movements from the moment they appear and begin their anti-democratic activities.

15. The Assembly also expresses its readiness to participate fully in the European Conference against Racism, which will take place in Strasbourg from 11 to 13 October 2000.

16. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

16.1. fully support the work of the ECRI and ensure that member states give a concrete follow-up to its recommendations;

16.2. instruct the ECRI to carry out an urgent in-depth examination of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools and of school textbooks, so as to bring to light any expressions of xenophobia or mystification of history that lead to hatred of other ethnic communities or social, political or religious groups;

16.3. ask member states to inform it of the specific follow-up given to the recommendations of the ECRI, including legislation passed, as well as of measures taken to combat public expressions of intolerance, xenophobia and racism;

16.4. address, as a matter of priority, the issue of combating the dissemination of racist material via the Internet, coming both from the far right and from the far left, through the drawing up of an international legal instrument;

16.5. discuss problems of discrimination and extremism in the framework of its monitoring procedures as a priority subject.