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Counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Ms Olga KAZAKOVA, Russian Federation, Representatives not belonging to a Political Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. To understand the upsurge of neo-Nazism it is necessary to consider the present state of European society and the challenge of coming to grips with Europe's diverse identities. The report is therefore timely and needed, especially given the growing manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Europe and worldwide.

2. The economic crisis, resulting in economic hardship for many, may exacerbate intolerance in its various forms and fuel extremist violence, targeting in particular minorities. While tackling the root causes of the phenomenon and trying to prevent its manifestations, it is also important to protect victims. Protection means, among other things, making sure that victims of neo-Nazi violence have access to justice.

3. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination proposes four amendments to the draft resolution and draft recommendation proposed by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In the title, after the words "neo-Nazism", add the words "and right-wing extremism".

Explanatory note: Some of the phenomena described in the report are linked to individuals and organisations not defining themselves as neo-Nazis. The amendment aims to ensure that the title reflects the scope of the report more clearly.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 2, insert the following paragraph:

> *"The Assembly expresses grave concern over the growing trend towards glorification in any form of the Nazi movement, neo-Nazism and former members of the Waffen SS organisation, including through building monuments and memorials and organising public demonstrations. The Assembly recalls that the Charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal and the judgment of the Tribunal recognised as criminal the SS organisation and all its elements, including the Waffen SS, the division "Galicia" and others."*

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 12661, Reference 3816 of 3 October 2011. Reporting Committee: Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. See Doc. 13593. Opinion approved by the committee on 8 September 2014.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 6, insert the following paragraph:

> *"The Assembly considers unacceptable any form of tolerance towards the actions of people and organisations practising neo-Nazism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia, hatred towards representatives of other peoples or religions, intolerance against Roma people, migrants and national minorities. Such actions must immediately be publicly condemned and the perpetrators should be prosecuted."*

Amendment D (to the draft recommendation)

In the draft recommendation, paragraph 1, after the words "increasing number of manifestations of neo-Nazism (right-wing extremism)", add the words ", of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia, hatred towards representatives of other peoples, religions, intolerance against Roma people, migrants and national minorities".

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Kazakova, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. I wish to congratulate Ms de Pourbaix-Lundin on her report. To understand the upsurge of neo-Nazism, it is necessary to consider the present state of European society and the challenge of coming to grips with Europe's diverse identities.

2. Neo-Nazism is not a new phenomenon, but is increasingly widespread, and has sometimes entered the political and institutional landscape, including through representation in several parliaments. The report is therefore timely and needed, especially given the growing manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Europe and worldwide. A better knowledge of neo-Nazism in its various forms may help preventing it from spreading further. Ms de Pourbaix-Lundin's report is a constructive text, aimed at finding ways to eradicate these phenomena at the national and pan-European level, as well as to strengthen efforts to prevent the expansion of the scourge of neo-Nazism.

3. Among the main reasons for the increase in manifestations of neo-Nazism, the rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy indicates the reaction, mainly by the younger generation, to the consequences of the financial and economic crisis, as well as the inability of national governments to create efficient socially oriented models of society and to develop successful migration policies. The economic crisis, resulting in economic hardship for many, may exacerbate intolerance in its various forms and fuel extremist violence, targeting in particular minorities. All too often, in times of high unemployment rates and decreasing salaries, for instance, foreigners – particularly migrants and asylum seekers – easily become scapegoats for the discontent of other groups.

4. Neo-Nazism, however, is not merely a form of xenophobia. Racism, including against the Roma, aggressive nationalism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and the quest for "ethnic purity" are some of its characteristics.

5. I fully share Ms de Pourbaix Lundin's focus on prevention, particularly through education, as it appears that youth is a favourite and easy target for neo-Nazi propaganda. In addition, extremist groups increasingly rely on social media and other technological means, particularly popular among the youth, to spread their message and recruit followers.

6. I wish to recall the comment of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, who stated that many European leaders, instead of dealing with the threat of neo-Nazism, "add fuel to the fire" by reinforcing the actions of the extreme right-wing political organisations through their own statements.

7. I would like to use this opinion to recall a number of events which took place in several Council of Europe member States but are not mentioned in the report, such as the glorification of former Nazis and collaborators and the desecration of monuments to members of the anti-Hitler coalitions. The same applies to annual meetings and marches of Veterans of the Waffen SS, the demolition of monuments to anti-fascist soldiers and the building of monuments to former Nazis. Therefore, it is important to remember that, in

accordance with Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which all member States of the Council of Europe are Parties, such facts cannot be classified as a manifestation of the right to freedom of expression, and should be prosecuted.

8. I deem it necessary to stress that the concept of tolerance does not apply to the actions of people and organisations practising the principles of neo-Nazism: xenophobia, anti-Semitism, hatred towards representatives of other peoples and religions, and intolerance against migrants and national minorities. The fight against them must be uncompromising and visible.

2. The role of politicians: no hate speech in political discourse

9. Neo-Nazi propaganda surfs on social discontent and turns it into violence. Hate speech, even from people who are not directly linked to right-wing extremism, and particularly from politicians, may play a role in this process. Politicians have a special responsibility to lead by example and should always be aware that their words and deeds may have an influence on people's mindsets. Respect for all, irrespective of their origin or status, in the political discourse, is crucial: hate speech and offensive language targeting specific groups or individuals may be perceived as a justification for discrimination against them and even violence. Political leaders should act as unifying forces, rather than dividing the different elements of society.

10. The No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, established earlier this year at the initiative of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, is a timely and relevant structure which may make a constructive contribution to the prevention and counteraction of hate speech.

11. The Alliance is based on a Charter which refers to texts adopted both by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, as well as to the activities of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). It condemns hate speech and manifestations of intolerance on any grounds as incompatible with the respect of the fundamental values of the Council of Europe.

12. Members of the Alliance commit themselves to taking open, firm and proactive stands against racism, hatred and intolerance on any grounds, to promoting non-discrimination and respect for diversity, and to raising awareness against racism and intolerance amongst politicians and civil society, at the national and European levels.

13. In parallel to the Parliamentary Alliance, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has established a mandate of General rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance. Throughout her two-year mandate, the General Rapporteur, Ms Maria Giannakaki, has the duty to "intervene in the areas of racism, intolerance, hate speech, racist violence and racial discrimination". Her intervention may take various forms, in particular by contributing to raising awareness on the need to combat racism and intolerance, following relevant developments in Council of Europe member States.

14. In performing such important duties, the General rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance carries out a variety of activities, by following the work of the various Council of Europe bodies dealing with racism, intolerance, hate speech, racist violence and racial discrimination, as well as the work of other organisations, including national parliaments but also intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

15. I believe that better synergies between the Parliamentary Assembly and the intergovernmental sector within the Council of Europe are crucial to strengthen the impact of the activities of the whole organisation. Co-operation with the working group on hate speech set up by ECRI would be particularly useful. I find it positive that the General rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance, together with the General rapporteur on the rights of LGBT people, will participate in the next ECRI meeting in December 2014, and will celebrate together Human Rights Day.

3. A victim-centred approach

16. Neo-Nazism is not an abstract concept: it is a concrete problem which brings violence into the life of a multitude of people. While tackling the root causes of the phenomenon and trying to prevent its manifestations, it is also important to protect victims. Also in this respect I am in full agreement with Ms Pourbaix-Lundin.

17. Protection means, among other things, making sure that victims of neo-Nazi violence have access to justice. The surveys conducted by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency provide relevant information, including about the victims' perception and the vulnerability of target groups to discrimination and

crime. For instance, one in four people from a minority group said they had been a victim of a crime at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. These figures demonstrate the need for determined action by the national authorities.