European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: Recommendations for Media in Second Report on the Netherlands

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Although adopted on 15 December 2000, the Second Report on the Netherlands by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) was only recently released to the public. The Report contains, inter alia, recommendations relating to the media.

These recommendations are twofold. The first calls for "stricter compliance" with the self-regulatory regime that prevails in Dutch journalism. Among the provisions of this regime are the stipulation that a person's race, nationality, religion, etc., should only be mentioned when relevant and the stipulation that the soliciting of immigrants' viewpoints should not be restricted to issues that directly concern them. Similar guidelines exist for the dissemination of information by the police and their overriding objective is to avoid ethnic stigmatisation by law enforcement officials.

The Report's second major recommendation for the media sector concerns the Internet: Essentially, the "ECRI encourages the Dutch authorities in their efforts to counter the dissemination of racist material through the Internet." This recommendation must be viewed against the backdrop of the establishment in 1997 of the State-funded Magenta, Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet (Magenta, Dutch Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the Internet - MDI), a hotline for discrimination-related offences on the Internet. The raison d'être of the MDI is, as outlined in its Mission Statement, to curb the dissemination of discriminatory and racist expression "on the Dutch part of the Internet, including content that is hosted/situated abroad, but is written in the Dutch language and/or is aimed at the Dutch public."

ECRI is a body of the Council of Europe that is committed to the advancement of the struggle against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in Europe. A primary focus of its work is the compilation and, ultimately, the publication of individual country reports. The first country report on the Netherlands was published in June 1998 (after having been adopted one year previously).

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