European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: Media Provisions of Six New Reports on Racism

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The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recently made public six new reports as part of the second cycle of its monitoring process of the laws, policies and practices to combat racism in the Member States of the Council of Europe. Each of the reports (Andorra (CRI (2003) 2), Azerbaijan (CRI (2003) 3), Liechtenstein (CRI (2003) 4), Lithuania (CRI (2003) 5), Moldova (CRI (2003) 6) and Sweden (CRI (2003) 7)) contains provisions on the media.

A recurrent theme in the reports is that of self-regulatory codes of conduct for the media profession. In Andorra, Azerbaijan and Moldova, ECRI "strongly supports the adoption and implementation" by media professionals of codes of conduct which would "favour a more responsible type of reporting". It hopes that the Press Code in Lithuania will be reviewed "to take into account the need to protect from negative stereotypes all minority groups within Lithuanian society".

These statements were prompted by concerns that the media in the countries in question had been showing tendencies to: (i) mention the nationality of the alleged perpetrators of crimes, even when this was not relevant to the crime itself; (ii) report on issues relating to minorities in a manner which, instead of contributing to a general climate of tolerance, was creating or exacerbating biased or stereotyped images of certain sections of society. In order to counter the former trend, ECRI encourages the media profession in Liechtenstein to "follow up" on existing codes of conduct. In order to curb the latter trend, ECRI similarly encourages the media profession in Sweden to implement relevant ethical codes for reporting and "to take further steps to `mainstream' persons of minority origin in media reporting and in the media professions".

ECRI highlights that there is a legislative requirement in Moldova that 65% of the total duration of programming broadcast by the audiovisual media (public and private) should be in the national language (apart from programming targeting areas densely populated by national minorities). Notwithstanding the Institute for Information Law (IViR) University of Amsterdam aim of this provision to protect the national language, ECRI hopes "that the Moldovan authorities will ensure that the application of such legislation, particularly in relation to the granting or withdrawal of media licences, does not harm the development of the minority languages spoken in Moldova". In a similar vein, ECRI notes in its report on Lithuania that there has been a decrease in "the time allocated to television

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programmes on issues relevant to national minorities or in their languages".

"Council of Europe: Six new reports on racism", Press Release No. 204a(2003) of 15 April 2003

http://press.coe.int/cp/2003/204a(2003).htm

ECRI reports examining racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance in Andorra, Azerbaijan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova and Sweden, 15 April 2003

http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/

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