Parliamentary Assembly: Recommendation on Media and Terrorism

IRIS 2005-8:1/3

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On 20 June 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Recommendation 1706 (2005), entitled “Media and terrorism”. The Recommendation builds on PACE Resolution 1271 (2002) and Recommendation 1550 (2002), both entitled “Combating terrorism and respect for human rights”, and refers explicitly to the Committee of Ministers' Declaration on freedom of expression and information in the media in the context of the fight against terrorism (see IRIS 2005-3: 3).

Recommendation 1706 (2005) stresses that the right to freedom of expression and information encompasses the public's right to be informed on matters of public concern, including terrorist acts and threats, as well as the responses which such acts and threats elicit from States authorities and international organisations. It recalls the responsibility of the media: to help to prevent the creation of spirals of fear; to contribute to informed public debate on terrorism, the suffering it causes and the context in which it takes place, and to be duly respectful towards “the privacy and human dignity of victims of terrorist acts and their families”.

It invites (bodies of) media professionals to: develop codes of conduct for dealing with terrorism; organise special training programmes to increase awareness within the sector of the need for sensitive reporting on terrorism; ensure greater cooperation in order to avoid rat races for sensationalist coverage of terrorism; “refrain from disseminating shocking pictures or images of terrorist acts which violate the privacy and human dignity of victims or contribute to the terrorising effect of such acts on the public as well as on the victims and their families”, and avoid fanning the flames of underlying societal tensions in their reporting and commentary.

PACE recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask Council of Europe Member and Observer States to regularly inform the public and the media about governmental anti-terrorist strategies and measures. Similarly, PACE calls for the Committee of Ministers to impress on States that they should not use the pretext of combating terrorism to prohibit or unduly restrict “the provision of information and opinions in the media about terrorism as well as about the reaction by state authorities to terrorist acts and threats”.

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The Recommendation concludes with PACE asking the Committee of Ministers to: “monitor the treatment of terrorism in European media”, paying particular attention to the aforementioned Committee of Ministers' Declaration; “prepare, under the guidance and in close co-operation with” media bodies, UNESCO and other organisations, a handbook for journalistic reporting on terrorism and violence, and “initiate work towards an additional protocol to the Convention on Cyber Crime setting up a framework for security co-operation between member and observer states for the prevention of cyber terrorism, in the form of large-scale attacks on computer systems and through computer systems which threaten national security, public safety or the economic well-being of a state”.

The Recommendation is based on a longer, identically-titled report by the PACE Committee on Culture, Science and Education.

Media and terrorism, Recommendation 1706 (2005), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 20 June 2005

http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta05/EREC1706.htm

Media and terrorism, Report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education (Rapporteur: Mr. Josef Jarab), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 20 May 2005, Doc. 10557

http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc05/EDOC10557.htm

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