European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: Media Provisions in New Country Reports on Racism

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The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recently made public five new reports as part of the third cycle of its monitoring process of the laws, policies and practices to combat racism in the Member States of the Council of Europe (for commentary on earlier reports, see IRIS 2005-7: 3). Four of the country reports (Cyprus, Italy, Luxembourg and the Russian Federation) contain specific recommendations concerning the media.

A recurrent, two-fold recommendation entails the ECRI encouraging the State authorities to:

- “impress on the media, without encroaching on their editorial independence, the need to ensure that reporting does not contribute to creating an atmosphere of hostility and rejection towards members of any minority groups”;

- “engage in a debate with the media and members of other relevant civil society groups on how this could best be achieved”.

Slight variations in wording occur: in the report on Cyprus, it is as quoted *supra* (para. 90); in the report on Italy, the “minority groups” are explicitly considered to include “non-EU citizens, Roma, Sinti and Muslims” (para. 79), and in the report on the Russian Federation, “visible minority groups” (the formula that is used instead of “any minority groups”) are stated as “including Roma, Chechens and other Caucasians, as well as citizens from CIS countries” (para. 121). In respect of Cyprus and Italy, the double-barrelled recommendation is the only media-specific recommendation. In respect of the Russian Federation, ECRI also expressly reiterates in the context of the media its recommendations elsewhere in the report “concerning the need to ensure that all instances of incitement to racial hatred are thoroughly investigated and punished” (para. 120).

In the report on Luxembourg, the one media-specific recommendation is also two-pronged. The ECRI recommends that the State Government should “help the media to do their job in a spirit of full respect for everyone, by promoting and supporting any initiatives to provide them with training courses on racism, racial discrimination and antisemitism”. The second prong of the recommendation is a call on the Government to “ensure a more active implementation of the legislation on discrimination in media circles when this proves necessary” (para.

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The country report on Denmark - the fifth in the latest batch of reports to be released by the ECRI - does not contain any recommendations relating specifically to the media. However, it repeatedly addresses topics that could be brought under the banner of "hate speech" and are thus of relevance: proactive prosecution of anyone who makes racist statements (paras. 20 and 107); Holocaust-denial and related anti-Semitic offences (paras. 86 and 87); incitement to racial hatred against Muslims and the need for awareness-raising campaigns (which would include media involvement) "in order to present a more objective and balanced view of Muslims and Islam and to foster a constructive debate on living in a pluralist society" (para. 92). Finally, the ECRI "strongly recommends that the Danish Government should encourage and provide financial support to initiatives aimed at training journalists on issues pertaining to human rights in general and to racism and racial discrimination in particular" (para. 108).

Although the five country reports were only made public on 16 May 2006, they had been adopted by ECRI on 16 December 2005.

"Council of Europe: Reports on racism in Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg and the Russian Federation", Press Release of 16 May 2006

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/5-Current_events/44-eng_16_05_2006.asp#TopOfPage

ECRI country reports

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