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 four new reports as part of its ongoing 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 2006-6: 4 and IRIS 2005-7: 3). Each of the country reports, which examine the situation in: Monaco (for the first time); Azerbaijan (for the second time) and Finland and Ireland (both in the context of the third monitoring cycle), contain specific recommendations concerning the media.

In respect of Monaco, the ECRI recommends that the State authorities: (i) encourage the establishment of "an independent self-regulatory body to deal with complaints against the media"; (ii) encourage the drafting of a code of professional ethics for the media, to include treatment of issues such as racism and racial discrimination, and (iii) "support any initiatives taken to raise media awareness of these issues" (paras. 52 and 53).

The ECRI's primary recommendation concerning the media to the Azerbaijani authorities is a two-pronged formula that is becoming increasingly standard in ECRI monitoring work, but which is usually adapted to the specificities of the country in question (see IRIS 2006-6: 4). Thus, it recommends that the State authorities:

- "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, including Armenians, asylum seekers, refugees and other non-citizens, as well as members of religious and national minorities";

- "engage in a debate with the media and members of other relevant civil society groups on how this could best be achieved" (para. 73).

The same double-barrelled recommendation is made to the Finnish authorities, but without elaborating on the particular groups likely to be covered by "minority groups" (para. 90). The ECRI also recommends that the Finnish authorities "strengthen their efforts to counter the dissemination of racist material on the Internet" (para. 91).

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The main recommendation bearing on the media in respect of Ireland focuses on values such as fairness and balance: “while fully respecting the principle of freedom of expression and editorial independence, the authorities [should] encourage fairness when issues pertaining to ethnic minority groups, asylum seekers, refugees and immigrant communities are discussed by the media” (para. 112).

It is also noteworthy that the ECRI recommended to all of the States’ authorities in question that they ratify, as soon as possible, the Additional Protocol to the Convention on cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems.

“Council of Europe: Reports on racism in Azerbaijan, Finland, Ireland and Monaco”, Press Release of 24 May 2007

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/5-Current_events/48-eng_24_05_2007.asp#TopOfPage

ECRI Reports on Monaco, Azerbaijan, Finland and Ireland, adopted on 15 December 2006

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