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

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On 26 May 2009, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) made public its latest reports on Belgium, Germany and Slovakia, adopted in the fourth round of its monitoring 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 2009-5: 4, IRIS 2008-4: 6, IRIS 2006-6: 4 and IRIS 2005-7: 3).

In respect of Belgium, ECRI "strongly recommends" that the State authorities "pursue and step up their efforts to combat the presence of racist expressions on the Internet" (para. 100), including through international cooperation efforts to eliminate "legal loopholes" which allow racist material to be disseminated online. The relevance of ECRI General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 6 on combating the dissemination of racist, xenophobic and antisemitic material via the Internet is recalled in this regard. ECRI also encourages the Belgian authorities "to continue their efforts to raise awareness among the media, without encroaching upon their editorial independence, to the need to prevent not only their own coverage but also readers' discussion forums hosted on their websites from contributing to the creation of a climate of hostility and intolerance towards members of minority groups" (para. 101). It is further recommended that the Belgian authorities "engage the media and members of the relevant civil society organisations in a debate about the best means of achieving this" (para. 101).

In respect of Germany, ECRI recommends that the State authorities "intensify their efforts to counter racist, xenophobic and antisemitic activities on the Internet", again recalling the relevance of ECRI GPR No. 6 in this connection (para. 74). It encourages the German authorities "to raise awareness among the media, without encroaching on their editorial independence, the need to ensure that reporting does not perpetuate racist prejudice and stereotypes and also the need to play a proactive role in countering such prejudice and stereotypes" (para. 75). Again, it recommends engagement with the media and civil society organisations with a view to achieving this aim (para. 75).

Whereas the report on Slovakia does not contain a section dealing specifically with the media and the Internet, some recommendations made elsewhere in the report are of relevance for actors in both sectors, e.g. a recommendation about awareness-raising designed to inform public discourse and thinking (para. 95).

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ECRI Reports on Belgium, Germany and Slovakia (fourth monitoring cycle), all adopted on 19 December 2008 and published on 26 May 2009

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