European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: New Country Reports on Racism

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On 2 March 2010, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) made public its latest reports on Albania, Austria, Estonia and the United Kingdom, 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 2009-10: 0/109, IRIS 2009-8: 5, IRIS 2009-5: 4, IRIS 2008-4: 6, IRIS 2006-6: 4 and IRIS 2005-7: 3).

A number of key recommendations dealing with the (audiovisual) media and/or the Internet can be distilled from relevant sections of these reports. The first features consistently in ECRI's country reports. It is a recommendation to State authorities to "impress on the media, without encroaching on their independence, the need to ensure that reporting does not contribute to creating an atmosphere of hostility and rejection towards members of minority groups and the need to play a proactive role in countering such an atmosphere" (Report on Austria, para. 84). This general recommendation is formulated in a much more terse way in the Report on Estonia (para. 104), but it does not feature explicitly in the Report on Albania. In the Report on the United Kingdom, ECRI "strongly encourages" the State authorities to "continue and intensify their efforts" in this regard, in conjunction with the media and civil society (para. 138). ECRI also calls for successful local-level initiatives to be replicated at the national level (ibid.). In respect of Austria and Estonia, ECRI calls on the State authorities to support any relevant initiatives by the media, e.g., training on human rights, racism and diversity (paras. 84 and 104, respectively).

The second main recommendation concerns the prosecution and punishment of media that incite racial hatred (Report on Estonia, para. 105), and efforts to combat racism on the Internet (ibid. and Report on Austria, para. 87).

The third main recommendation focuses on media ethics. ECRI urges the Albanian authorities - without interfering with the independence of the media - to encourage the media to "ensure compliance with ethical standards, verify that the new Code of Ethics constitutes an effective means of combating all forms of racist discourse in the media and strengthen it if necessary" (para. 79). ECRI calls on the Austrian authorities to "promote the reestablishment of a regulatory mechanism for the press, compatible with the principle of media independence,

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that would make it possible to enforce compliance with ethical standards and rules of conduct including the refusal to promote, in any form, racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism or intolerance" (para. 83). It suggests that the authorities should "consider enacting legislation if there is no other option" (ibid.).

The fourth and final main recommendation concerns access to the broadcast media for minorities. For instance, ECRI "encourages the Albanian authorities to ensure that all the minorities and communities living in Albania are given the possibility of disseminating information on their cultures in the public media" (para. 82). Similarly, it encourages the Austrian authorities to "pursue their efforts to improve the availability of electronic media in the languages of national minorities, and recommends that they ensure that public service broadcasting caters for the needs of all minority groups, including groups other than national minorities" (para. 85). It also calls for improved representation "in media professions of persons of immigrant origin or belonging to ethnic minorities" (para. 84). These references implicitly acknowledge the importance of access and content-related issues for pre-empting, countering or alleviating racism and intolerance.

ECRI Reports on Albania, Austria and Estonia (fourth monitoring cycle), all adopted on 15 December 2009, and ECRI Report on the United Kingdom (fourth monitoring cycle), adopted on 7 December 2009; all published on 2 March 2010

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