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

IRIS 2012-4:1/2

Tarlach McGonagle
Institute for Information Law (IViR), University of Amsterdam

On 21 February 2012, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) released its latest reports on Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Montenegro and Ukraine, adopted in the fourth cycle 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 2011-4/3, IRIS 2010-9/2, IRIS 2010-4/3, IRIS 2009-10/109, IRIS 2009-8/4, IRIS 2009-5/4, IRIS 2008-4/5, IRIS 2006-6/4 and IRIS 2005-7/2). With the exception of the Report on Montenegro, all of these reports contain sections focusing specifically on the media/Internet.

In this latest batch of reports, two main preoccupations regarding the media/Internet are apparent: (i) the role of the media in countering hostility and rejection towards certain societal groups, and (ii) the role of the Internet in disseminating racist and xenophobic expression.

As far as the first point is concerned, ECRI follows the approach it has consistently taken in its earlier monitoring work: States authorities should 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 minority groups (Reports on Iceland (para. 68), Italy (para. 57), Luxembourg (para. 82), Ukraine (para. 57); it should be noted that the precise wording varies per report). ECRI further states that the media or States authorities should play a pro-active role in preventing the emergence of such an atmosphere, including through media training programmes and other initiatives (Reports on Ukraine (paras. 57 and 58), Italy (para. 57) and Luxembourg (para. 82)). In respect of Latvia, ECRI calls on the authorities to specifically encourage “those media addressing exclusively either the majority of the population or the Russian speakers to engage in objective reporting of events” (para. 93).

Also in keeping with its previous monitoring work, ECRI emphasises the importance of self-regulatory standards (eg. the development of and/or adherence to journalistic codes of ethics or practice) and mechanisms for preventing the dissemination of racist and discriminatory expression via the media (Reports on Italy (para. 58) and Latvia (para. 90)). In respect of Iceland, this general recommendation is adapted to focus specifically on “the manner of

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

reporting on the citizenship or ethnicity of suspects in criminal cases" (para. 68).

In addressing the second point, ECRI routinely draws the attention of States authorities to its own General Policy Recommendation No. 6 on combating the dissemination of racist, xenophobic and antisemitic material via the Internet (2000) (Reports on Iceland (para. 71), Italy (para. 61) and Ukraine (para. 61)). The approaches recommended by ECRI in this connection vary from monitoring the Internet (Report on Iceland (para. 71)), to creating a "law-enforcement unit with dedicated capacity to monitor the Internet for instances of racism or racial discrimination" (Report on Latvia (para. 90)). On other occasions, general/open wording is used, such as combating the dissemination of racist and xenophobic ideas via the Internet (Report on Italy (para. 61)). Elsewhere, the emphasis is more explicitly on the prosecution of persons "responsible for publishing and disseminating racist material via the Internet" (Report on Ukraine (para. 61)), and also "members of the media who incite racial hatred" (Report on Luxembourg (para. 82)).

ECRI Reports on Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Montenegro and Ukraine (fourth monitoring cycle), all adopted between 6-9 December 2011; all published on 21 February 2012

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/default_EN.asp?

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026